

VAN RICHTEN'S GUIDE TO RAVENLOFT!

# DRAGON+



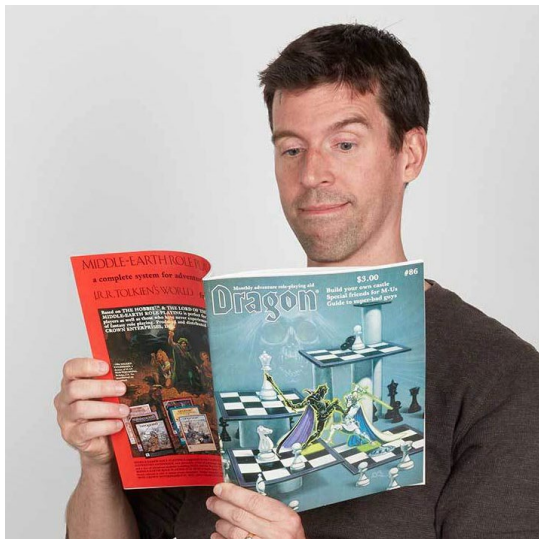
MEET  
Candlekeep  
Mysteries'  
adventure  
authors

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

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## ISSUE 36



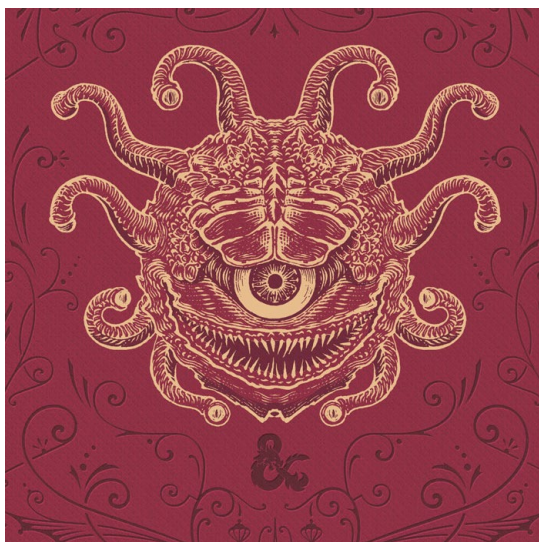
### Welcome to Dragon+ Issue 36

Who could've guessed at the start of last year when we wished everyone good luck slaying monsters, it was the year itself that would be a monster? Moving on to 2021...



### Imagining The Ampersand: Clint Cearley

The illustrator talks menacing shadows and hidden words as he brings Candlekeep to life.



### Candlekeep



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Meet the anthology of adventure authors who have gathered to tell the latest fifth edition tales—many of them new alongside the existing team.



## D&D Dinner Date: Heroes' Feast

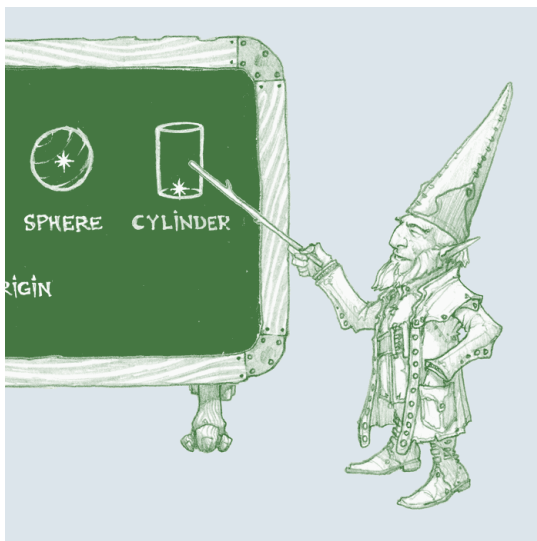
When that important celebration or intimate night in has to take place in the courtesy of your home, the authors of the D&D cookbook have your back.

Continue our tour of the hot new products coming soon, including Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft and a host of digital D&D.



## Character Spotlight: NPCs

Max Dunbar and Adam Lee unveil a major new collaborative series for Dragon+.



## D&D After School

Stefan McNinch worked a little after-school magic with an innovative Dungeons & Dragons program to set the kids involved on the path to success, Jane Hoskyn reports.



## D&D Virtual Play Weekends

Chris Tulach discusses the latest way to play D&D online every month, whether you're on Discord, Fantasy Grounds, Roll20, or Zoom.



## The Best of the Dungeon Masters Guild

This issue we follow the muse



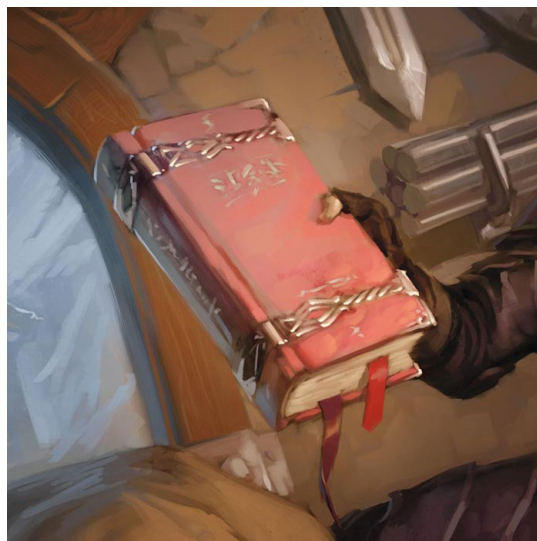
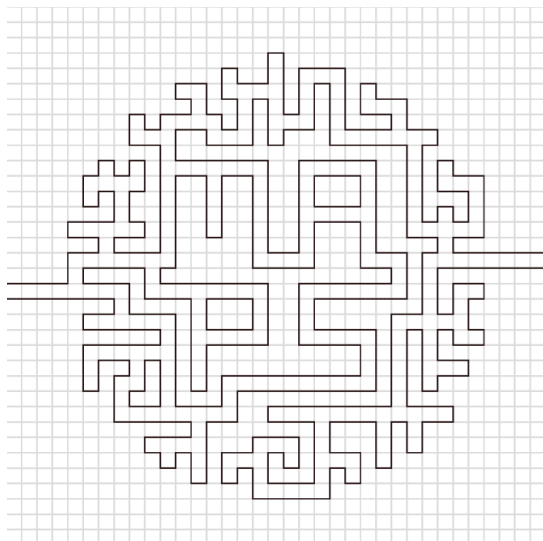
## Win an Epic D&D Adventure!

Enter for a chance to live out your medieval fantasy at



and induct stories for the ages into the world of fifth edition Dungeons & Dragons.

Warwick Castle courtesy of Comic Relief.



## Maps of the Month: Icewind Dale, Dragon Heist, and Ghosts of Saltmarsh

Beyond Candlekeep, more maps for the libraries in your game!

## Unearthed Arcana: Gothic Lineages

Transform into a creature of the night with options to become a dhampir, a hexblood, or a reborn.



## D&D Classics

Take a look. This issue, it's in a book... a great many books, shelved in Candlekeep and beyond.



## Streaming Highlights

This issue's streams showcase D&D personalities, a worthy cause, and a rivalry in Waterdeep...



## Chris Tulach

Our introduction to members of the D&D Team and their roles continues with the Product Manager for D&D Play.



## Next Issue: Dragon+ 37

Shapes shift in the shadows as Van Richten's advice continues...

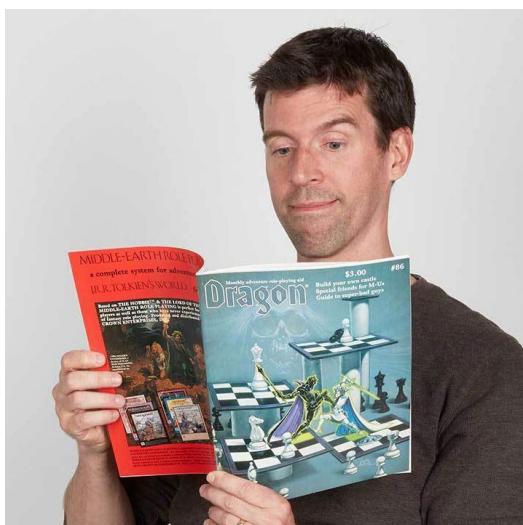




# DRAGON+ 36

## Welcome to Dragon+ Issue 36

Who could've guessed at the start of last year when we wished everyone good luck slaying monsters, it was the year itself that would be a monster? Moving on to 2021...



Bart Carroll

hi folks:

Blame me?

Last year I penned *Dragon+*'s first welcome letter of 2020. It was a missive filled with optimism and excitement, themed around 2020 as the Lunar Year of the “Double Crit” Rat (featured on the cover). Hoo boy. It's not that I believe in jinxes... but if I did, I'd throw myself on the mercy of whatever court of superstition is in

session.

Everyone had a tremendous amount to deal with throughout 2020. Obviously. Whether medically, economically, politically—you name it. In my neighborhood of West Seattle, even the bridge connecting us with the rest of the city cracked and had to be shut down (cue *Escape from New York* theme). It was that kind of year. I mean, we were originally supposed to be worried about murder hornets. Murder hornets!

Only in 2020 are actual murder hornets low down on the list of dangers to avoid.



Considering how we're still in the midst of lockdowns and quarantines, I'd just like to reiterate the message to stay safe, play safe, and look for brighter days to come. If 2020 taught us anything (beyond how to cut our own hair), it was to seek out activities that help us better cope, distract, and occupy ourselves during these times.

For myself, there've been well-meant efforts to learn cooking (so much olive oil), and French (so many extraneous letters). There's also been a huge amount of remote gaming. I've started regular *Magic Arena* sessions with friends; and even though one of my DMs, Greg Tito, also lives here in West Seattle, we get together for our D&D campaign via Zoom... at least, when we're not busy getting floodwater out of our basements (another 2020 delight).

In addition, another safe and remote activity for many folks these days has been reading. Which brings us to *Candlekeep Mysteries*.



(select to view)

## THE JOY OF READING

This issue, we browse the shelves of Candlekeep in the forthcoming D&D adventure anthology framed around the game's famed library and its books. So many books. Which are always a pleasure to have—the more books, the better.

A few years back I was asked which three “desert island” books I'd take with me. At the time, my choices were *The Hobbit*, *Etymologicon*, and the first edition *Dungeon Master's Guide*. If I only

got three, I wanted books with good re-readability (although there has to be an old joke about choosing *Raft Building 101* instead.) For Christmas this year, one of the gifts I gave to myself (I do that now as an adult; I even pretend I don't already know what they are and wrap them) was a book analyzing the *DMG's* Appendix N.

If you're not familiar, Appendix N referenced books that helped

influence the game; or at the very least, offered suggested readings for fans of the game. It's a notable list. And, as with a great many things in the first Edition *DMG*, so very oddly placed. Without peeking, any guesses what surrounding Appendixes M and O covered?\* Of course, since the *DMG* was first published back in 1979, there's been a wonderful continuation, and evolution, and outright explosion of fantasy and speculative fiction literature; and if this list were written today, who knows what else it might include?

I imagine many of us have our own versions, listing books that have influenced our gaming interests and continue to inspire the characters we create and the campaigns we run. For myself, this would include the far-future fantasy of Gene Wolfe's *Book of the New Sun*, China Miéville's Bas-Lag/New Crobuzon novels, Lev Grossman's *Magicians* series, R.A. Salvatore's *Icwind Dale* trilogy, and as much Norse, Greek, and Celtic/Gaelic folklore and mythology that I can lay my hands on.

And for *Dragon+* Editor-in-Chief Matt Chapman, he notes: "One of the books that had the biggest impact on me as a kid was *Dracula's Spinechillers Annual*."

"Annuals are a staple holiday gift in the United Kingdom (check out the *D&D Annual 2021*) but this was a surprising choice by my parents for a number of reasons. First, even though I was into fantasy, I'd never been a big horror fan—partly because I'd watched *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* on TV at a young age and not been able to sleep for two nights, causing the parentals to limit my exposure to such material from that point on. Second, my parents might have briefly flicked through *Dracula's Spinechillers* when they bought it, but they clearly hadn't clocked the savage imagery in those comic strips or done a deep dive into its tales of blood drinking.



(select to view)



“I was suddenly hooked on vampires, so the chance to go up against one in Dungeons & Dragons was a real thrill! I didn’t even know how iconic Count Strahd von Zarovich was at that point and it’s been a treat to see that I wasn’t the only one to fall under his spell, as he continues to dog the footsteps of parties to this day in *Curse of Strahd Revamped*.”

In the spirit of offering further recommendations for anyone looking for more books to try, we’ll talk with the creators of *Candlekeep Mysteries* and find out which books similarly inspired them. Just head over to this issue’s *D&D Classics* and take a peek!



(select to view)

## OUT WITH THE RAT, IN WITH THE OX

With the Year of the Rat behind us, 2021 ushers in the Year of the Ox. As the five elements are apparently in rotation (earth, wind, fire, water, and metal), we’re more specifically now in the year of the *metal ox*. Which sounds awesome! Although in D&D terms, this also sounds like a **gorgon**... and its poisonous breath. So, yikes—still too close to current events. But a reminder I suppose for life as well as for adventuring parties, to continue to stay safe, to stay vigilant in our precautions, and to look out for one another.

And if you do come across a gorgon in your D&D campaigns, please be sure to slay the damned thing.

*\*Appendix M: Summoned Monsters; Appendix O: Encumbrance of Standard Items. How does a list of suggested reading fit between these two, you ask? A half-page column of space that needed to be filled, I can only guess?*



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## Imagining The Ampersand: Clint Cearley

The illustrator talks menacing shadows and hidden words as he brings Candlekeep to life.

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**D**ress for the job you want, they say. Especially if that job is Batman. Artist Clint Cearley borrowed that concept and applied the same logic to his portfolio. Looking to make the move out of graphic design and into illustration, he tailored his work to one particular subject matter.

“I knew it’d be good to have in mind where I actually wanted to work and think about the kind of art I hoped to produce. I had my eyes on Wizards of the Coast because I was familiar with its properties and I thought it’d be cool to create art for a company like that,” he admits.

“When I was building a portfolio, I made sure it was largely made up of fantasy images. I submitted it to Wizards and they liked it, so they signed me up, which sounds pretty straightforward. But I’d spent a long time before that gaining the skills to create a competitive

portfolio.”

Those talents are once again on display on the cover of this magazine. In many ways, the image Clint has created for *Dragon+* is reminiscent of his cover for *Candlekeep Mysteries* (two adventurers appear within an abundance of books), although the sense of movement this time comes from the books themselves rather than the creepier inhabitants of Candlekeep.

“The *Dragon+* cover is more about the mood,” Clint explains. “The style is like a movie poster, delivering a more general feeling without necessarily defining a specific scene or event. I wanted it to represent *Candlekeep Mysteries* as if you are playing through one its adventures. It’s a collection of those elements, including exploration, mystery, stories, background threats, and, of course, books.”

And there’s more than just an ampersand hidden within our cover image this issue, as Clint also needed to embed a few other elements within it.

“I was supplied with a variety of different covers from the seventeen books that appear in *Candlekeep Mysteries* and I added some of those titles into the books you can see in the foreground,” Clint reveals, as he also draws attention to the eye-like window behind the characters.

“I decided to include an element in the background to help fill that space and give it some context. I used the stained-glass pattern of a beholder, with the eyestalks fanning out. I’m a fan of beholders. You always have to be on your game if you’re going against them as an enemy.”



Concept 1 (select to view)

### Do you currently play D&D?

I've played a few times with my brother but I mainly watch streams of people playing. Generally, in the morning while I'm working, I don't have anything on as I'm fully focusing. But there's a point in the afternoon where I'm ready to listen to something as my brain slows down. And that's when I'll put a podcast on. *Critical Role* is the one I've watched the most.

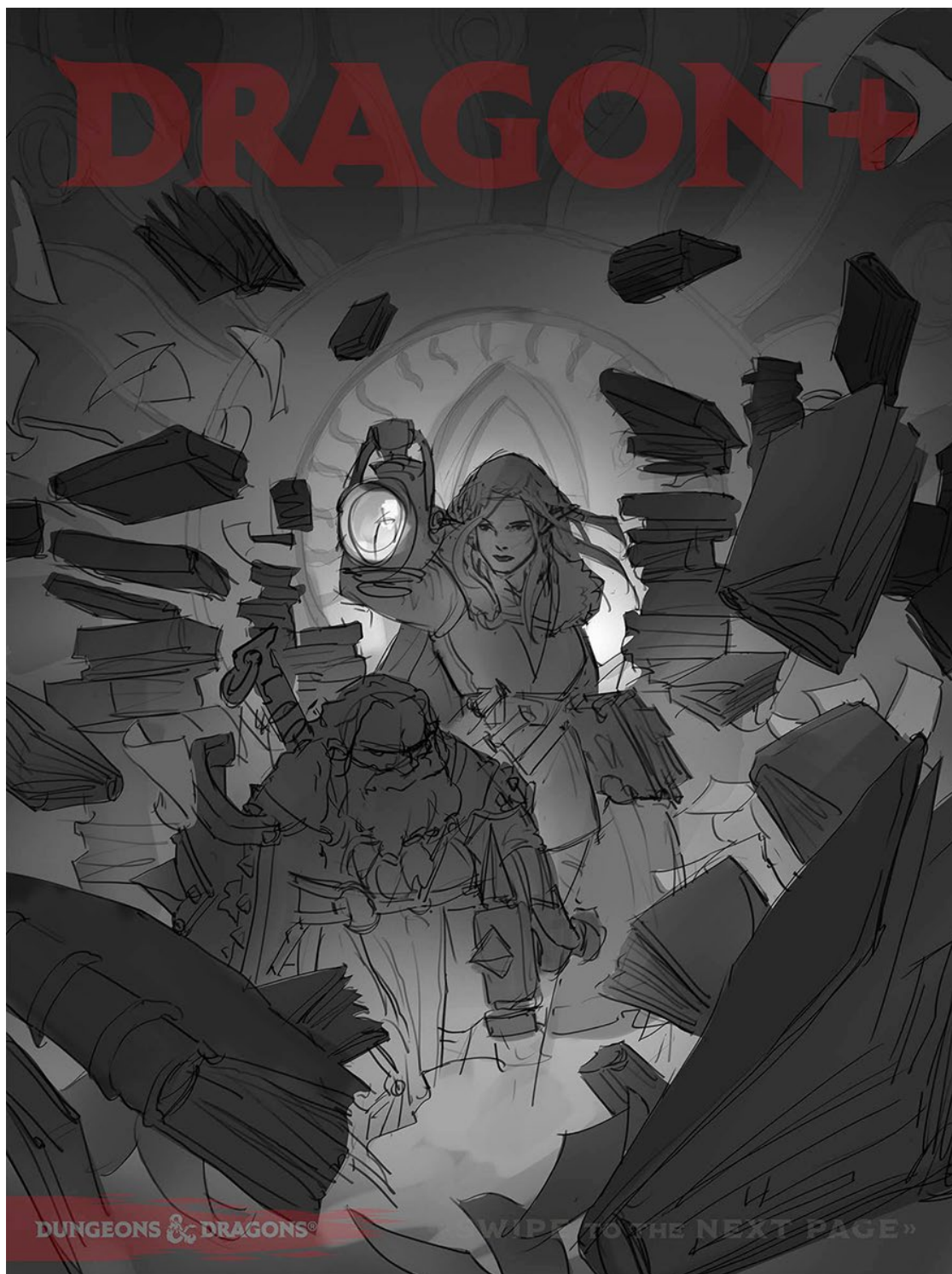


### **How did you first become an artist?**

Art is something that I've always enjoyed, even as a kid. My mom taught me for a while when I was younger, and I started studying a lot more during my teens. I took some classes from a local artist, read a lot of books, and did some workshops. And I practiced a lot in traditional media. It wasn't until years later that I started using digital art. But after seven or so years as a graphic designer I decided it wasn't really my thing and I made the transition back into illustration.

### **Would you describe yourself as being self-taught?**

Yes and no. My mom took some art classes in college and she was able to teach me enough to get me going. But I didn't go to any kind of university, college or art school. I learned a lot through books, taking some workshops, and following exercises from teachers. It was more about my love of art and creativity, which helped motivate me and inspired me to do what I do.



Concept 2 (select to view)

### **How would you describe your style?**

Illustrator realism is probably a good way to describe it.

### **What's your creation process like?**

Most of my work is now digital. I'm just not as fast in traditional media at this point and digital is more editable. But my process is very methodical. I create sketches and then refine those, go and find

references, do value studies and color studies, and make sure to cover my bases as I work my way into the actual painting.

### Where have our readers seen your work before *Candlekeep Mysteries*?

I've been working with Wizards of the Coast for ten years or more. I've handled a variety of Planeswalker images—Nissa, Jace and Liliana—and created art pieces that were used on *Magic: The Gathering* boxes. I've been responsible for over 100 MTG cards in total, as well as a variety of different D&D illustrations and various book covers over the years.





### **What was the brief for the *Candlekeep Mysteries* cover?**

The whole thing needed to have a feeling of ominous danger and mystery, with shadowy black hands on the walls encroaching behind them. The team supplied me with an old D&D cover showing a wizard reading a book with beakers and other things on the table around him and asked if I could take some inspiration from that. That's why I went with a very centered positioning for the characters and took cues about where the table is in the foreground, looking at them from that viewpoint. I also researched images of Candlekeep itself as I wasn't familiar with it as a location. I quickly learned that there aren't many existing images of the interior of Candlekeep.

### **Are the hands that are projecting in the background of these two characters separate from the spiders coming out of the drawers?**

They're not necessarily the same threat. I drew the bookcase with its drawers open to break up the plane of the image. Since they were open, I then thought it would be cool to add the spiders coming out of them. Those ones you can see far down on the left of the full image appear on the back cover of the book. They help to add a little movement to that part of the image.

I also really wanted to play with the perspective and the warping of the camera, to give the appearance that the bookcases were encroaching on our two readers. I wanted the environment itself to feel ominous. It gives an unnatural feel to everything. It's almost as if they're being listened to, that the whole place is alive.

### **How easy was the lighting to achieve? It has an amazing, ghostly quality to it...**

It seems straightforward but I tried quite a few variations to make that work. How light should it be? How dark? How much atmosphere? How clear? Do we really need to see that bookcase detail? I didn't want it to be too well lit. If it's too light, these characters feel safe. It has to be dark enough to be scary but not so dark that you start losing the color. It's a balancing act but I knew I'd hit the right point once the two characters pop out.

### **We can see detail in the papers. Is anything hidden in there?**

You'll find a lot of that detail is just scribble. I have hidden real information before on *MTG* images, in papers that were showing. But here, I mainly drew maps and sketched a few items. One Easter egg

is that the book the characters are looking at has the alternate cover of *Candlekeep Mysteries*. The art director asked if it would be possible to include the alt cover, very subtly. I drew that faded version and that's what we went with.

**You can see more of Clint Cearley's work on [his official website](#), buy prints at [InPrint](#), and connect with him on [Instagram](#). *Candlekeep Mysteries* is released 16 March, 2021 with an MSRP of \$49.95 and can be preordered now.**

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## CANDLEKEEP MYSTERIES

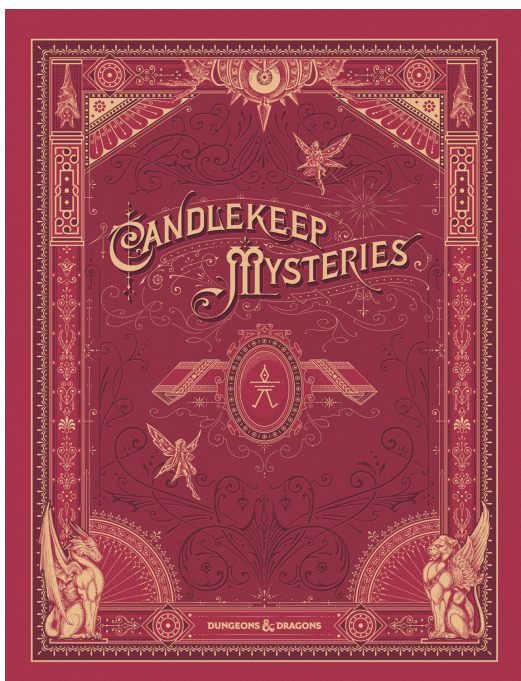
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# Candlekeep Mysteries: Introduction

Meet the anthology of adventure authors who have gathered to tell the latest fifth edition tales —many of them new alongside the existing team.

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Alternate cover (Select to view)

Candlekeep attracts scholars like a flame attracts moths. Historians, sages, and other seekers of knowledge flock to this library fortress for one reason: its vast collection of books. But great books hide their secrets well. None more so than the tomes catalogued in *Candlekeep Mysteries*, each one a doorway to adventure.

*Candlekeep Mysteries* is a collection of seventeen short, stand-alone D&D modules designed for characters of levels 1-16. Each tale begins with the

discovery of a book, and each book is the key to a door behind which danger and glory await. Dare you cross that threshold?

Telling these glorious tales are a collection of seventeen D&D adventure authors and *Dragon+* got a chance to chat with all of them. They reveal what it was like being called into action, the enigma of a good mystery, and how your clothes dryer can be an essential aid



when it comes to mapmaking.

*Candlekeep Mysteries* is released March 16, 2021 with an MSRP of \$49.95. Alongside its seventeen mystery-themed adventures, it contains a poster map of the library fortress and detailed descriptions of Candlekeep and its inhabitants. Preorder a physical copy at your [local game store](#), bookstores such as [Barnes & Noble](#) and [Books-A-Million](#), or online at retailers such as [Amazon](#). Also available as a digital version at [D&D Beyond](#), [Fantasy Grounds](#), and [Roll20](#).



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CANDLEKEEP MYSTERIES

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## BOOK 1: The Joy of Extradimensional Spaces by Michael Polkinghorn

Meet the anthology of adventure authors who have gathered to tell the latest fifth edition tales —many of them new alongside the existing team.

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Michael Polkinghorn started his professional life as a geologist. He now works in the wine industry and can often be found walking the vineyards of Sonoma County with his family and four house tabaxi.

“I’ve written up a bunch of my own campaigns, but this is the first content I’ve produced for an official D&D publication. It’s

been exciting to get the chance to write for the D&D Team,” Michael Polkinghorn tells us from his office/game room/podcast recording studio, where his players previously occupied the microphones for the *Relic of the Past* podcast before playing over Zoom became the norm for so many gamers.

Michael’s relationship with Dungeons & Dragons starts back in “the age of disco. A time of dubious fashions and even more dubious music. And don’t get me started on the interior design.” His parents bought him the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Coloring Album* as a

sixth grader in 1979, which in addition to being a coloring book also included a stripped-down version of the game that could be played using d6.

“You would roll d6s to figure out what happened as you chose your path through the story,” he explains. “For our sixth-grade graduation day, my friends and I went down to the park and played through it. Then that summer my friend Brian got the *D&D Basic Set*, we bought the AD&D manuals, and it took off from there. We played all the way through second edition until the beginning of third edition, when I became a senior in college. I had moved far away from all my gaming friends, and this was before the internet so there was no real way to keep in touch. I came back to D&D when my eldest son was around a sixth-grade age and asked, ‘Hey dad, have you ever heard of this Dungeons & Dragons?’”

Until a few years before that request Michael still had all of his D&D gear stored in boxes—including packs of Grenadier miniatures—but it was lost in a garage fire. He replaced it with the fourth edition Dungeons & Dragons books and joined the playtest for D&D Next. As that wrapped up, the group he was playing with decided to start a fifth edition campaign.

“At that same time, we were running into a problem. I’m the Scoutmaster for a scout troop and we’d play Dungeons & Dragons podcasts while driving the scouts on outings. Some of them are ten years old but even the eighteen-year-olds have to be clean in their manners and there weren’t a lot of clean podcasts out there. One of the players who was going to be in the fifth edition campaign said, ‘Why don’t we podcast this?’ We had no idea what we were doing but we did it anyway. And we’ve been doing the *Relic of the Past* podcast ever since.”

The D&D Team reached out to Michael through the podcast email address and asked if he wanted to be a part of *Candlekeep Mysteries*.

“Of course, I said, ‘Yes! That sounds like fun.’ Working with Chris Perkins has been one of the best parts of this whole process. He also acted as the brakes on my more outlandish ideas. I’d lay down the first version of the story and he’d point out that what I was suggesting would require a brand new, non-canon, 9th-level spell! I’d

say, ‘Okay, well, how about we do it this way?’”



Each of the tales in *Candlekeep Mysteries* revolves around a riddle that needs to be solved. The mystery at the heart of *The Joy of Extradimensional Spaces* is inspired by an afternoon’s entertainment.

“I got the idea from playing an escape room over in the neighboring town of Sebastopol, and I thought it would be an awful lot of fun to have an adventure like that. Then I remembered that back in the day Château d’Amberville [*X2 Castle Amber*] was basically one giant escape room. You get stuck in a mansion full of strange people where weird magical things are happening, and you have to figure your way back to reality. In my story the mystery is the mansion itself.”

## Michael's Favorite Fictional Detective



*For the presentation of the character, it has to be Monk. Because... Tony Shalhoub. Scooby Doo is also in there near the top. But when it comes to the actual sleuth themselves, it's Sherlock Holmes. Taking all those itsy bitsy, disjointed pieces of information and collecting them together as a whole is always fun to do.*



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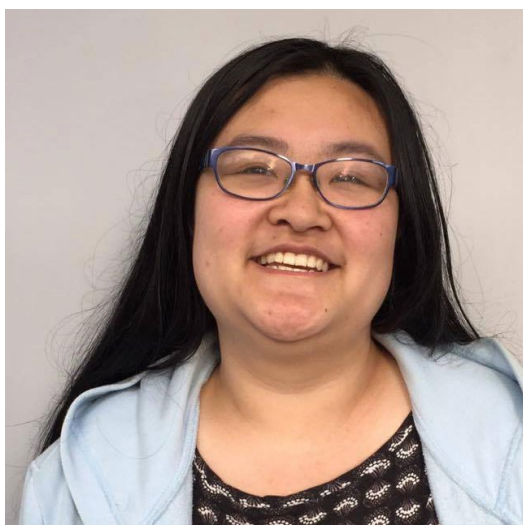
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## BOOK 2: Mazfroth's Mighty Digressions by Alison Huang

Meet the anthology of adventure authors who have gathered to tell the latest fifth edition tales—many of them new alongside the existing team.

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Alison Huang began creating adventures in late 2018 and contributed to the *Uncaged* anthology. She won two silver ENnie Awards in 2020 and helps train new adventure writers as part of the RPG Writer Workshop. She lives in Melbourne, Australia.

“In October 2019, Chris Perkins tweeted asking for freelance writers to add to his list. I

responded, and was fortunate enough to be noticed by Chris and added to that list. And in January 2020 I received an email asking if I wanted to be part of this project. The rest is history,” Alison Huang tells *Dragon+*, as she marks her first work on an official D&D publication, having previously written content for **the DMs Guild**.

Alison's story highlights a significant security issue for Candlekeep: books have been vanishing from the library! The adventurers are tasked with investigating the people who brought the books into the library in the first place, but things are very much not what they seem.

“The writing itself was my favorite part. There’s something thrilling about putting down your ideas to paper and watching your concept develop into something playable,” Alison says, revealing that the initial pitching and concept phase was the most challenging part of the process.

“The concept for *Mazfroth's Mighty Digressions* arose from a back and forth I had with Chris during the pitching stage. It definitely wouldn't be what it is without Chris's opinion on what direction I should take my story. Unfortunately, I can't give anything else away without it being spoilers!” she says.

“Most adventures have some element of mystery to them, and I think it's fun to lean into that aspect and build something around it. Especially when you consider that there are a lot of spells that you have to keep in mind. For instance, what happens if someone casts *detect magic*? It adds an extra layer of challenge to the process but it's super rewarding when you actually figure it out.”

Alison also explains that while *Mazfroth's Mighty Digressions* can be played as a standalone one-shot, it works extremely well at the start of a new campaign.

“It's a good adventure to run when as the DM you're beginning to figure out what goals each character has, and you're starting to drop hints of what's to come. *Mazfroth's Mighty Digressions*—the book not the adventure—is an eclectic series of essays, which means you can decide what information and plot hooks it contains.”

## Alison's Favorite Fictional Detective

*Phoenix Wright from the Ace Attorney games. Technically he's a lawyer and not a detective, but that doesn't stop him from solving some truly bizarre crimes. The strangeness of those crimes and the general tone of the series are partially why he's my favorite. It's melodramatic*





© Nintendo

*and surprisingly lighthearted for a series that deals with a lot of murders. There's just something really engaging about having a kindhearted and good-natured defense attorney deal with that level of ridiculousness.*

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CANDLEKEEP MYSTERIES

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## BOOK 3: Book of the Raven by Christopher Perkins

Meet the anthology of adventure authors who have gathered to tell the latest fifth edition tales —many of them new alongside the existing team.

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Chris is a world-famous Dungeon Master who has contributed to more than five hundred D&D products and worked on every edition of the game. He is one of the architects of fifth edition and has worked at Wizards of the Coast since 1997. He lives in Seattle, WA with a hell hound named Milo.

“My first job at Wizards of the Coast was editor of *Dungeon Magazine*, which was a periodical that published short adventures. My role on *Candlekeep Mysteries* was much the same: commissioning short adventures, working with freelancers, writing art orders, and copyfitting text. I find that work very satisfying, even relaxing at times,” says Chris Perkins, who was tasked with putting together a large ensemble team for the project.

“My search for writers began with an innocuous tweet, asking the D&D community to share their favorite writers. A few names were mentioned over and over, so I did a little research and reached out to some folks.

“Every writer was given the same instructions: to pitch a short adventure revolving around a book in Candlekeep’s library. Each writer was given a level range in which to set their adventure, as well as license to create their own book and the mystery surrounding it. I reviewed the pitches and made sure that every adventure felt unique. After the pitches were approved, I reviewed first drafts and gave feedback. We assigned each adventure to a developmental editor, and then I came in behind the editors to do the final edit and copy fit.”

Chris also led by example, writing the story *Book of the Raven* to give the freelance writers a concrete example of what he was looking for.



“I didn’t intend to publish it, but the adventure was the right length and level to fill a particular hole in the book. The mystery is straightforward: the characters find a treasure map nestled in the



pages of a book. Where the map leads is the mystery.

“Some of my favorite D&D adventures are built around mysteries. What really happened? Why is this happening? Who is behind it? These sorts of questions are often the foundation of a compelling D&D adventure hook.”

## Chris' Favorite Fictional Detective

*I'd have to say Sherlock Holmes, as I'm a sucker for stories set in Victorian England. I like the character's multifaceted quality and Sir Arthur Conon Doyle's storytelling.*



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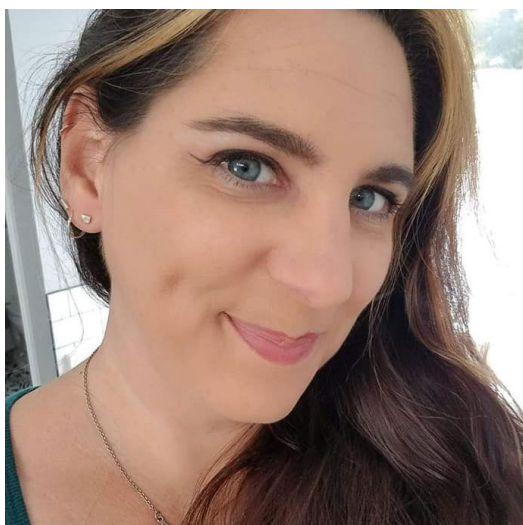
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## BOOK 4: A Deep and Creeping Darkness by Sarah Madsen

Meet the anthology of adventure authors who have gathered to tell the latest fifth edition tales—many of them new alongside the existing team.

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Sarah is an Atlanta-area author who has been writing since she penned her first vampire story in sixth grade, and when not writing, she can be found playing video games or dabbing in the background of her sons' video chats. Her simple pleasures include gin cocktails, fancy lattes, and romanceable NPCs.

*A Deep and Creeping Darkness* might be the first time Sarah Madsen has contributed to an official D&D book (“I’m very excited!”) but she’s no stranger to publishing. When Chris Perkins put out a call looking to add names to his list of freelancers, she replied with a few examples of the work she’s produced for Kobold Press and the **DMs Guild**.

“I got an invite from Bill Benham a few months later. I understand how publishing timelines work but it still startles me how much time has passed since then! The process is amazing but it’s also quite long,” she says. “But new projects are always exciting because of the potential, and the anticipation on this one was jacked up to eleven. Everyone has been wonderful and communicative, and it’s really

made the whole thing go as smoothly and as stress-free as possible.”



Sarah’s tale begins with a book that describes a mining disaster, prompting the adventurers to search for a missing town in a mystery that will keep them guessing until the end



“The idea that the adventure had to revolve around a mystery was a really fun concept. I am a fan of the mystery format and I’m always very impressed with those who can pull off the necessary twists. A lot of times, mysteries center around the idea of a missing item or a missing person, but I thought: What if a whole town went missing?”

With all this talk of teasers, Sarah shares her current favorite in-game mystery with *Dragon+*: “I’m playing in a wonderful campaign that started out as *Curse of Strahd* but has since spun us off into Alhaster. All of our PCs are from different realms of existence, and we’re on a vague quest given to us by a mad seer at the World Serpent Inn. We’re desperately trying to piece together what we’re supposed to be doing and who the bad guys really are so we can all go home. It’s been a ton of fun.”

## Sarah's Favorite Fictional Detective

*I adore Millie Bobby Brown in Enola Holmes—I would have loved to have seen (or read) her when I was younger. I also really love Daniel Craig as Benoit Blanc in Knives Out. It felt like he was embracing the ridiculousness of detectives such as Hercule Poirot, but for a modern era. And, of course, **Angus McDonald** is the world’s greatest boy detective.*



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## CANDLEKEEP MYSTERIES

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# BOOK 5: Shemshime's Bedtime Rhyme by Ari Levitch

Meet the anthology of adventure authors who have gathered to tell the latest fifth edition tales —many of them new alongside the existing team.

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Ari toils as a writer for D&D, which he will continue to do without complaint until the terms of the curse have been fulfilled. His adventure is dedicated to his dad Elliott, to whom libraries were hallowed ground.

“I think by default I enjoy playing through mysteries the most. I gravitate toward detective characters in D&D. Even those

characters I intend to be hulking fighting machines end up falling into this inspector role that I just love,” says Ari Levitch, who has created narrative elements such as world building and story design during his three years with the D&D Team.

“While I contributed to *Baldur’s Gate: Descent into Avernus* alongside Adam Lee, *Candlekeep Mysteries* was my first opportunity to write an adventure for an official D&D product. Adam explained that what separates writing an adventure from writing a narrative story is the idea that you create all the setups but you don’t ever get to spike the ball. It was a new challenge because I’m not telling the story, I’m writing a how-to manual that allows other people to tell

this story.”



Ari’s adventure, *Shemshime’s Bedtime Rhyme*, takes place in Candlekeep itself, in a forgotten area called the Firefly Cellar. He admits that while it was exciting to get to play in such a storied place as Candlekeep, it was also a little intimidating.

“Each of these stories is a book and some of them take you far away from Candlekeep. My adventure, *Shemshime’s Bedtime Rhyme*, is strictly based in a small section of Candlekeep itself, in a place called the Firefly Cellar, which houses a neglected collection of books,” he tells *Dragon+*, adding that Chris Lindsay’s work on the *Gazetteer* elements of Candlekeep laid a lot of the necessary groundwork.

“So many elements in D&D have a legacy going back decades. But within that space, there is still a lot that is unknown which can be explored and built upon. Chris Perkins also has an encyclopedic knowledge of everything Dungeons & Dragons and he gave us the tools we needed to play with. As I wrote my adventure it was a great help to be able to ping him about anything.



“Once I had the maps, the most enjoyable part for me was filling out the details of the rooms. Creating even a tiny part of something as iconic as Candlekeep and getting to have my own little corner of the place was incredible.”

## Ari's Favorite Fictional Detective

*My favorite fictional sleuth is detective Josephus “Joe” Aloisus Miller from The Expanse, played by Thomas Jane. I know some people say his voiceover takes them out of that story but I like how self-aware he is. And I love it that Miller still pops up in cameos in the show.*



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CANDLEKEEP MYSTERIES

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## BOOK 6: The Price of Beauty by Mark Hulmes

Meet the anthology of adventure authors who have gathered to tell the latest fifth edition tales—many of them new alongside the existing team.

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Mark Hulmes is the Dungeon Master for a variety of livestreamed D&D shows and runs a TTRPG- and LARP-focused **YouTube channel**. He has just begun his writing and game design career but has created lots of homebrew content, from adventures to paladin oaths.

*Candlekeep Mysteries* is about to teach adventurers that the phrase “don’t judge a book by its cover” is as much a health warning as it is a suggestion not to get hung up on outward appearances. Picking up any tome in the walled library, no matter what its text says or which images play across its cover, can be like stepping through a doorway to an adventure perhaps not everyone will survive. And in a nod to that well-known saying, it’s important to note that not every writer can be judged by their Twitter handle.

“You may think you can guess my favorite fictional sleuth from **my Twitter account** but I picked that name because my surname Hulmes sounds like Holmes and somebody once said to me, ‘You should call yourself Sherlock Hulmes. That’s funny.’ I thought that was genius

and couldn't believe I hadn't thought of it before. After that I started using it for everything," Mark Hulmes tells *Dragon+*.

Mark landed the gig on *Candlekeep Mysteries* after meeting Bill Benham and other members of the D&D Team at the **Lucca Comics & Games convention** in Italy. He chatted with them about his *High Rollers* liveplay stream and his homebrew creations and thought nothing of it. Then out of the blue he received a message.

"I was about to sit down and play video games and I looked at an email that came in from Bill and Chris Perkins. And it said that they wanted me to write an official adventure. I felt so honored to be asked, but I did write back and say, 'Look, you do know that I've not done this professionally before, so this would be my first time?'" Mark remembers.

"Bill's reply explained that part of this project's remit was to reach out to new writers to see what they could bring to D&D. They'd approached me because they felt I'd got a good voice and had ideas to share, which was incredibly humbling. He reassured me I'd get help to develop the adventure and to build up the skills I needed."

It's interesting to hear Mark describe his story, *The Price of Beauty*, as his first official written content for Dungeons & Dragons, when his role crafting the narrative as the Dungeon Master of an official D&D stream goes a long way towards fulfilling that description.

"I hadn't really thought of it that way," he admits. "I guess I don't plan *Nights of Eveningstar* as if that campaign is canon, I think of it as an alternate reality Forgotten Realms. By setting it in Cormyr, which doesn't appear in a lot of official material, I feel I have a little more space to throw in anything I want. Whereas writing an official D&D adventure anchors it in that world and immediately makes it canon!

"I was very cautious to make sure I set my story in the right place. Since playing when I was younger, it's been on my bucket list to write an official D&D adventure. This has been an incredible way to tick that off."

Mark's mystery comes in the form of a book written by a priestess of Sune, the goddess of love and beauty, which he describes as a *Live*,



*Laugh, Love* kind of self-help book. It shows the way to a secluded temple where beauty is only skin deep—what were we saying about books and covers?

“*The Price of Beauty* is a book about improving your appearance and feeling good about yourself. But there’s another element to it. If you’re not feeling particularly good about yourself, you can be transported to a magical day spa run by three elven sisters. And that spa is where my adventure takes place,” he says.

“You can enjoy its many spa services, and take part in other activities if you want. But there is more of a mystery going on for those who want to engage with it. Those who take the time to explore may uncover some sinister undertones. It’s meant to be a very fun episode that can act as an escape from your main campaign. Maybe the cleric is going to treat themselves to a break from babysitting the kids—aka the adventuring party.

“Since many quests are serious trips into mysterious castles or gloomy dungeons, I thought it’d be nice to give adventurers the day off. They need a chance to relax and the downtime between encounters is where some of the most memorable D&D moments play out. It’s a chance for those silly, fun, wholesome interactions to occur.

“But I also have a desire to showcase that D&D doesn’t always have to be about fighting. It’s totally okay to enjoy these more relaxed kinds of activities, too. I think that every burly, dragonborn barbarian should be able to embrace their inner self and take a moment to enjoy looking and feeling nice.”

## Mark's Favorite Fictional Detective

I’m a fan of the English cosy  
mystery and I grew up  
watching Mr. Hercule Poirot.  
I love his mannerisms, the  
way that dialogue is used, and  
the stories. David Suchet’s  
version of the character is  
amazing, you can’t not love

him as Poirot.



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CANDLEKEEP MYSTERIES

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## BOOK 7: Book of Cylinders by Graeme Barber

Meet the anthology of adventure authors who have gathered to tell the latest fifth edition tales —many of them new alongside the existing team.

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Graeme has worked as a scientific and commercial diver, deployed multiple times overseas with the Canadian Armed Forces, and done wet site archaeology. He's currently living a quieter life in the interior of British Columbia, where he enjoys diving, writing, and being a dad.

“The inspiration for my story comes from some of the cooler bits of archaeological knowledge I have absorbed over the years,” says Graeme Barber, going full Indiana Jones as he describes his first addition to an official D&D publication.

The title *Book of Cylinders* describes a set of engraved cylinders found within a book in Candlekeep library, which tell a gripping tale when rolled across wet clay. And it certainly lives up to that archaeological reputation, as it harks back to some of the earliest days of recorded history in the Forgotten Realms.

“The part I enjoyed the most was being able to link some of the deeper history and lore of the Forgotten Realms into the modern



period. I took some cool concepts from the Days of Thunder era and ran with them. The gist of the story is that things from the past are never gone, and the actions of the players could have far reaching impacts on a world they might not even know exists,” he says, adding that he’s a fan of the mystery format. “A lot of D&D adventures are functionally mysteries to start with, it’s just that the players seldom realize it. So it was fun to put together something that has the word *Mystery* on the cover.”



Graeme also notes that he often “mines premade adventures for ideas, treasure, monsters, and concepts”, and any Dungeon Master who does the same will be able to add the gripli to their fifth edition games. *Book of Cylinders* updates these frog-folk, who are distant relatives to bullywugs, and sheds light on gripli society.

“This adventure makes a fun and unusual side quest,” he suggests.

## Graeme's Favorite Fictional Detective

My favorite fictional sleuth is  
Columbo. He isn’t a genius  
and didn’t have sudden  
intuitive leaps, he simply

solved the mysteries he was presented with through a dogged observation of people and clues. He was also disarming in the extreme, causing people to persistently underestimate him.



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## CANDLEKEEP MYSTERIES

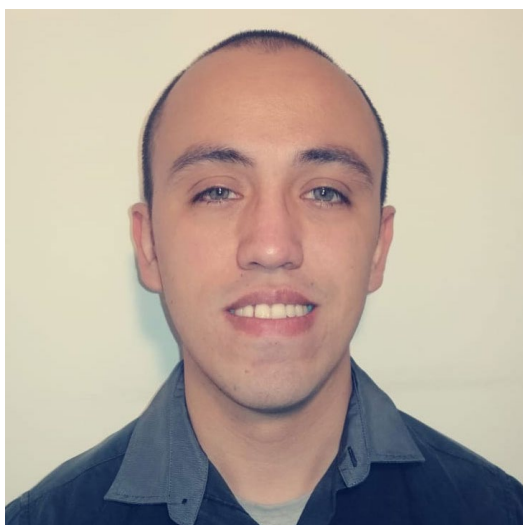
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# BOOK 8: Sarah of Yellowcrest Manor by Derek Ruiz

Meet the anthology of adventure authors who have gathered to tell the latest fifth edition tales —many of them new alongside the existing team.

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Derek began his career in the tabletop roleplaying game business writing adventures and illustrating maps of wondrous places for the award-winning *Elven Tower Cartography* blog. He lives in Mexico with his wife and three cats, and enjoys reading and playing new RPG systems for fun.

A good book hides its secrets well, but a good writer hides theirs even better. Derek Ruiz found himself among the elite group of authors chosen to put his stamp on Candlekeep, but couldn't shout it from the rocky crag overlooking the Sea of Swords. "The whole process of writing in secret was surreal and fun. It didn't feel real because I couldn't mention it to anyone, so when the day of the announcement finally came it felt pretty cool," Derek tells *Dragon+*. "I believe I was given the chance to participate through a combination of my [product library](#) on the DMs Guild, my [ENnie award-winning blog](#), and my [Patreon presence](#)."

Derek had previously created work for small publishers and

collaborative RPG products but this was his first time working on an official D&D sourcebook. He says the chance to get feedback from industry professionals was invaluable. “English is not my first language so getting published by Wizards of the Coast is a milestone. I live in Mexico so even before current restrictions everything had to be handled via email and video calls. It went back and forth with the editor’s feedback until we got the story to a publishable level.”



In *Sarah of Yellowcrest Manor*, a haunted book points a ghostly finger at the perpetrators of an unsolved mass killing in Waterdeep. This mystery features urban and dungeon exploration, as well as an otherworldly campaign villain, and is best suited to a mid-tier party with plans to head north from Candlekeep.

“My story revolves around a woman’s diary, which has been sold to



Candlekeep and then misplaced within the library's gigantic collection of books. The diary contains previously unknown information about a terrible crime that occurred some years back, and the diarist's spirit cannot rest until justice is served," he reveals.

## Derek's Favorite Fictional Detective

My favorite is Geralt of Rivia from *The Witcher* video game series. He shows up at a scene and starts talking to himself about all the clues and comes to an interesting conclusion right before my eyes.



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## BOOK 9: Lore of Lurie by Kelly Lynne D'Angelo

Meet the anthology of adventure authors who have gathered to tell the latest fifth edition tales —many of them new alongside the existing team.

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Kelly Lynne has done her fair share of storytelling, including being the Dungeon Master for *Girls Guts Glory*. She has also written for comedy television shows, animated shows, and stage musicals. She currently resides in Burbank, CA with a bucket full of hope, a mind full of dreams, and a room full of mounted dragon heads.

As the Dungeon Master for *Girls, Guts, Glory*, Kelly Lynne D'Angelo has been a welcome presence in the online streaming space for many years. When Chris Perkins reached out and asked her to be involved with *Candlekeep Mysteries*, she immediately said yes.

“It was so exciting as this is the first thing that I have officially written for Dungeons & Dragons. Being Haudenosaunee, I’m really honored to be one of the first Natives to be writing in this space. I saw this one hundred percent as paving the way.”

This might be Kelly’s first experience when it comes to published D&D adventures, but she’s very familiar with Forgotten Realms

history and was keen to share some of that lore. Alongside a conflict between Lurue the Unicorn Queen and Malar the Beast Lord, players also learn more about the High Forest itself on this wilderness journey.

“I love unicorns, deities, the power of the moon, and D&D exploration. And I have such a reverence for the Forgotten Realms,” Kelly explains. “Being able to dive into a space and begin to tangibly play with it like putty made me feel like I was becoming a part of that world. I knew that once other players read this, they would get excited about those same spaces, so it felt as if I was contributing to the environment. And that’s what D&D is all about.”

Kelly says that mysteries are one of her favorite forms of storytelling in Dungeons & Dragons, because when DMs see a light bulb go off in a player’s head, it’s enough to make them squeal with delight. And *Lore of Lurue* invites them deep into the heart of its mystery.

“I wanted to dive into a unique storytelling format. This is an enchanted storybook and the players are literally journeying through its pages, following a historical retelling of an event that previously occurred,” she reveals.

“It felt like a cool, one-off way of storytelling and something that can easily be dropped into a campaign. Especially if a DM is looking to add layers to their world building and give the players a richer feeling of the history of the Forgotten Realms.”

The only real issue Kelly encountered during the construction of her adventure for eighth level characters and onwards involved its cartography. She admits that the request to create relevant maps for her encounters left her sitting “dumbfounded” for several hours.

“I conceptualize things in my head and can describe them very articulately. But in terms of taking my physical hand and making them real, that’s not a skill set I possess,” she explains.

“I had to figure out how to convey my ideas in a way that looked clean and sleek, without spending two weeks in an advanced online college class to learn how to draw. I have so much respect and reverence for anybody who has any ounce of physical artistry in them.”

## Kelly's Favorite Fictional Detective

I started my sleuthing at a very young age, alongside Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen. They put out a fantastic series of mystery movies on VHS called *The Adventures of Mary-Kate & Ashley*. I'd be right there with them searching through old haunted mansions or trying to figure out these little capers.



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## CANDLEKEEP MYSTERIES

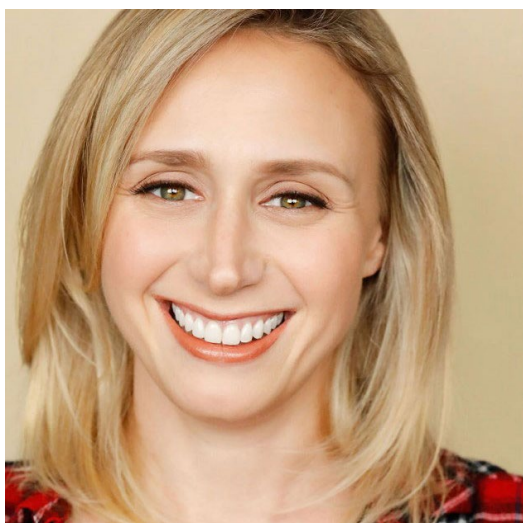
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# BOOK 10: Kandlekeep Dekonstruktion by Amy Vorpahl

Meet the anthology of adventure authors who have gathered to tell the latest fifth edition tales —many of them new alongside the existing team.

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Amy is a comedy actor and writer, having worked on several movies, commercials, and TV shows such as *The Newsroom*, *The Mindy Project*, and *Live from the 8th Dimension*. She's all over the internet as a digital media host, writer, and Dungeon Master.

Amy Vorpahl is no stranger to mysteries. As a player in college, it took around three years of a campaign to discover that one of the party members had been a doppelganger the entire time. As a DM, her players once solved the huge mystery that one of their blackheads was sentient.

“I’ve actually played in other games where players have done similar doppelganger reveals, but three years always felt like an immense amount of time to keep a secret. It was tear-jerking, and game breaking, and totally awesome,” she remembers. “And while I guess it wasn’t as narratively important as a three-year-long secret, the dermatological reveal still qualifies as one of the biggest mysteries because that’s how the player described the blackhead: Huge.”

In *Kandlekeep Dekonstruktion*, a stolen book leads adventurers to a tower in the walled library that is more than it seems. “My adventure follows an event that forces Candlekeep’s archmages to double down on security. The player characters need to solve the mystery of who or what could be compromising the structure and then deal with them before it’s too late!” Amy reveals. “My inspiration came from the pitch itself. After reading the passage about Candlekeep that was included in the initial instructions, I couldn’t stop picturing the maze of bookshelves and all the nooks and crannies that held such potential for secrets.”

With inspiration in the bag, it was time to track down some motivation. And Amy didn’t have to look too far from herself for a little encouragement.

“My main motivation was imagining my teenage self being flabbergasted that future Amy had this opportunity. I often pictured teenage Amy cycling between being frozen in shock and then jumping up and down in excitement during the process. I’m so stoked to think that I am blowing the lid off of what the childhood version of myself could conceive,” she shares.

Although Amy had already written a few adventures for the subscription service *Dungeon in a Box*, this was the first time she’s contributed to an official D&D sourcebook. Yet when it came to pitching, she was confident enough to submit only a single idea.

“The guidelines and adventure example that Chris Perkins provided helped generate a few fun ideas, but I submitted only one idea as a brief pitch. Chris’s response was, and I quote, ‘Your pitch is delightful.’ I still need to print that out and frame it. Once my idea was approved, I was off to the races with the nuts and bolts,” she recalls.

“I tend to rely a lot on my improvisational skills as a Dungeon Master, so writing out how I saw the world and each room—down to the items that could be looted—was a new challenge for me. In my games, I spend the most time prepping the NPCs because I tend to favor roleplay over combat. It was a lot of fun trying to communicate my ideas to a DM I haven’t even met yet, and I tried to write the NPCs from the point of view of, “Hey! I think this person would be

fun for your players to interact with,” she says.

“Although I found the detail-oriented parts challenging, making the tables was my favorite part of this process. I could be as creative as I wanted, and if every other row is fairly grounded, there’s always one entry that can be weird or silly, which is my bread and butter.”

Having created an adventure with a more light-hearted tone than many others in *Candlekeep Mysteries*, Amy peppered it with names and personalities of characters from some of the first games she ever played. *Kandlekeep Dekonstruktion* also contains an organization that uses code names for its members.

“For reasons that are absolutely narratively motivated and not nefarious or mischievous at all, my first draft of the adventure included an NPC named Dog Nuts. The character was mentioned only once, and I thought I might get away with it, but Chris Perkins reads every word, and that character’s name choice was highlighted as a bullet point in an email that read: “Dog Nuts?”

## Amy's Favorite Fictional Detective

It might be cheating to say Sherlock Holmes, but I also love Cormoran Strike. Sherlock because Benedict Cumberbatch. Both Sherlock and Cormoran because they never apologize for being who they are, which, in a lot of cases, is a highly intelligent ass.



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## BOOK 11: Zikran's Zephyrean Tome by Taymoor Rehman

Meet the anthology of adventure authors who have gathered to tell the latest fifth edition tales—many of them new alongside the existing team.

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Taymoor works with the creative teams behind D&D and *Magic: The Gathering*. He misses the snow of New York, loves non-alcoholic beverages, and wants you to be happy. This isn't the last you've seen of him.

Taymoor Rehman has established himself at Wizards of the Coast, having interned on a mobile product, worked as a contractor on

*Magic: The Gathering*, then jumped to the D&D Team. To give you an idea of how long it takes to produce a book of D&D adventures, since he began work on *Zikran's Zephyrean Tome*—his first D&D commission—he's seen both his numerous contributions to *Tasha's Cauldron of Everything* and his work on *Icwind Dale: Rime of the Frostmaiden* ("Enough that I'm credited in the book") be published.

"*Tasha's* might be my first big release but this adventure is the first thing I started work on," he confirms, adding that as someone who regularly fills the role of a Dungeon Master it was a surprise to discover how much work goes into creating a published adventure. "I



DM all the time but writing an adventure aimed at every D&D player is a lot different than running an adventure for four of my friends. In my home game I can make inside jokes and switch stuff up when necessary. But if you give people too many things in a published adventure, they'll ignore some of it. The trick is in giving them enough that they're prepared and they feel that the experience is going to be fun. It's a delicate balance."



The writing process on *Candlekeep Mysteries* was a back-and-forth affair, with regular feedback from project lead Chris Perkins. Taymoor spent his early pitches figuring out what worked and what didn't.

"It was a fantastic experience pitching to Chris," Taymoor remembers. "He offered a very frank critique but his feedback was always constructive and he was nice about it. The best criticism I got

was when I sent in a pitch that I was sure would work. Chris came back and said, ‘This isn’t a mystery.’ I read it again and realized he was right, it was just an adventure. That had to be fixed. Once we had the concept nailed down, Chris handed me the reins.”

Taymoor’s adventure features a book with a genie trapped inside it. This entity asks the players to help it escape from its hardback prison and the key to its release lies with the genie’s former master, a mad wizard on the cusp of mastering elemental magic.

“Many of the adventures in *Candlekeep Mysteries* rely on visiting that library itself. But you can run this adventure anywhere your players might find a book,” Taymoor suggests. “That’s a great metaphor for the fact that if you pick up a *Player’s Handbook*, it can lead you on a great adventure.”

## Taymoor's Favorite Fictional Detective

I grew up on classic Sherlock Holmes so I love a good mystery. I read the entire collected anthology of all of Arthur Conan Doyle’s works, in chronological order. It was this very big tome.



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## BOOK 12: The Curious Tale of Wisteria Vale by Kienna Shaw

Meet the anthology of adventure authors who have gathered to tell the latest fifth edition tales—many of them new alongside the existing team.

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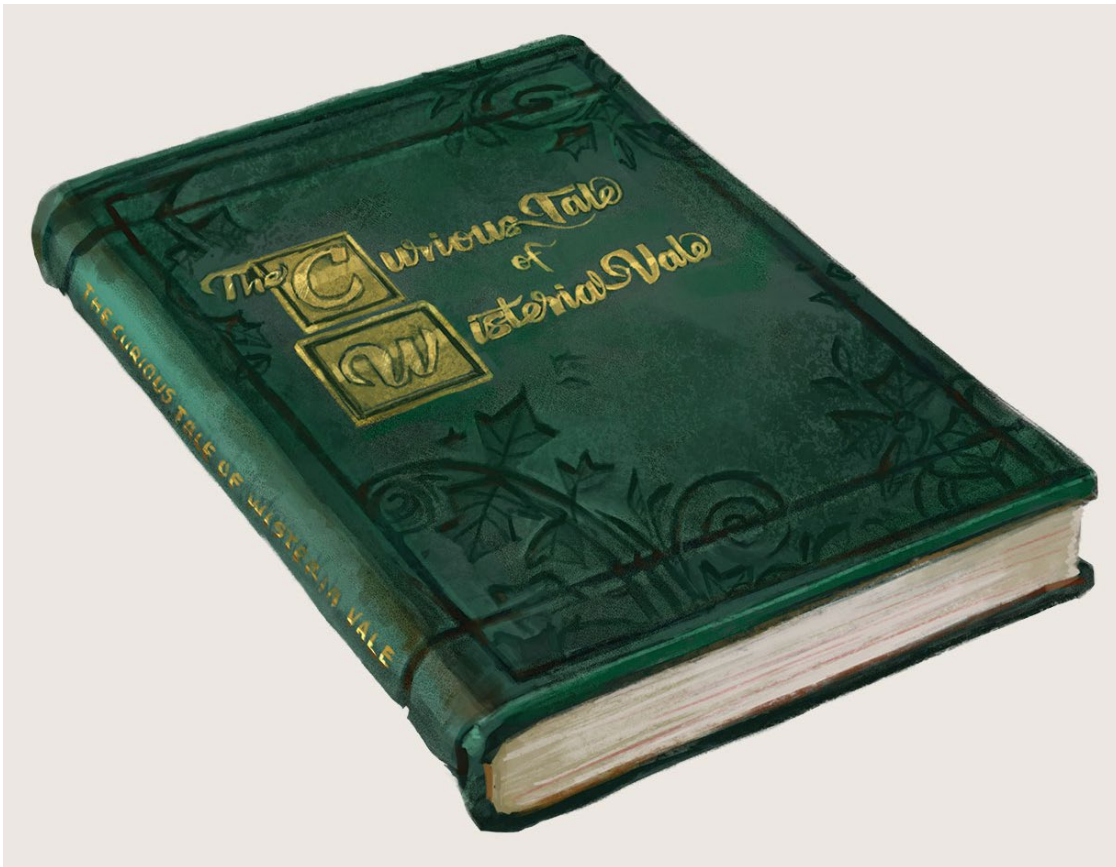
Kienna is a wearer of many hats in the tabletop roleplaying game industry, working as a designer, streamer, and community creator from her base in Canada. She is the co-curator of the TTRPG Safety Toolkit and has design credits in a variety of indie publications alongside her self-published works.

Sometimes you get what you wish for. Back in 2019, Kienna Shaw tweeted that one of her goals as a game creator was to eventually write for a publisher. Bill Benham saw the tweet and reached out to her, requesting a portfolio, and added her to the list of potential freelancers the D&D Team might work with.

“When the Candlekeep project started development, Bill reached out to me again, asking if I would be interested in working on it—to which I said, ‘Yes!’, and the rest is history,” she tells *Dragon+*.

Kienna’s book, *The Curious Tale of Wisteria Vale*, holds the key to freeing Arrant Quill, a bard who has languished in a demiplanar

prison. He's been awaiting a cure for his madness for years, and now that a remedy has been found, the adventurers must administer it. But Quill may not be the greatest danger that lurks in this prison plane.



“Other than the initial pitch of the story having to be a mystery, we were given explicit permission to explore adventures that didn’t take place in the Forgotten Realms or engage with traditional D&D settings. I appreciated that, as it gave flexibility to the creators to start with ideas that weren’t married to setting canon,” she says.

“A party playing through my adventure is sent to a strange demiplane on a quest to cure a legendary bard who has been corrupted by evil. My inspiration for the story comes from the strange twisting of reality that often goes hand in hand with fey tales. I also wanted to draw upon the power of twists and things being not quite as they seem that’s always employed so successfully in Shakespeare’s plays.

“If a DM is looking for a quick break from the main storyline of their campaign and would like to explore some structured shenanigans that will challenge how your players tackle problems, or if you’re looking for a way to get connect with the Harpers, then this is the right adventure for you!”



## Kienna's Favorite Fictional Detective

I really enjoyed Detective Benoit Blanc in *Knives Out*. He's clearly a deductive genius, but with the right amount of hamming up and silly shenanigans that we don't feel like he's taking himself too seriously or is too eccentric to ever "get".



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## CANDLEKEEP MYSTERIES

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# Book 13: The Book of Inner Alchemy by Daniel Kwan

Meet the anthology of adventure authors who have gathered to tell the latest fifth edition tales—many of them new alongside the existing team.

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Daniel Kwan is a Toronto-based podcaster, game designer, and cultural consultant. He is the co-host and producer of the award-winning *Asians Represent!* podcast and has published games such as *Denizens of Mountains & Seas* and *Ross Rifles*. Daniel also cofounded **Level Up Gaming**, an organization that helps adults with autism and other disabilities.

“Some of my fondest memories growing up were watching martial arts movies with my dad,” Daniel Kwan tells *Dragon+*. “Every week, we’d go to our local Blockbuster and rent kung-fu movies. Chinese wuxia and xianxia fiction have had a *huge* impact on the games I run—specifically the *Asians Represent!* podcast and *Dungeons & Da Asians* series. I wanted my adventure, *The Book of Inner Alchemy*, to emulate the feel of classic kung-fu movies from the Shaw Brothers Studio, such as *Executioners from Shaolin*.”

Although this is Daniel’s first contribution to an official D&D publication, he had previously pitched a new culture inspired by the Chinese bronze age to the D&D Team, so they had his writing on

file. When Bill Benham got in touch to invite him to the project, he once again brought something cultural to his work on *Candlekeep Mysteries*.

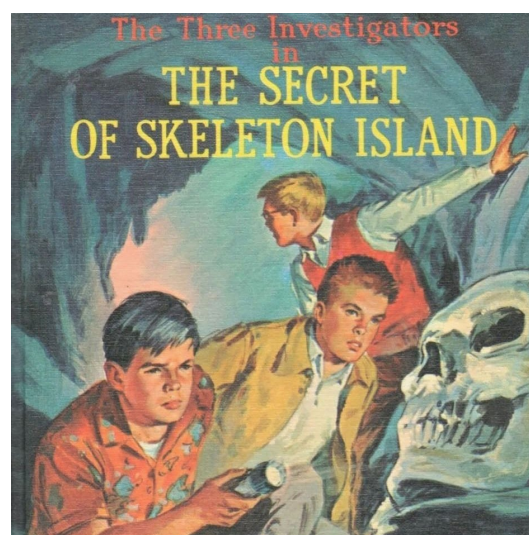
“The part of this process I enjoyed the most was being able to add to the lore about qi—or ki as it is represented in the Dungeons & Dragons monk mechanic. In Chinese culture, qi is the vital energy central to traditional Chinese medicine and it’s foundational to Chinese martial arts. I wanted to add more depth to its use in D&D,” he says.

Each adventure in *Candlekeep Mysteries* is represented by a book and Daniel’s takes the form of a martial arts manual. A search for the missing pages of the *Book of Inner Alchemy* puts adventurers in conflict with the monks of the Immortal Lotus. Heroes who defeat these Shou villains and retrieve the pages can learn the secret to making gloves of soul catching, a new and legendary magic item described in the adventure!

“This adventure is perfect for players looking to learn more about martial arts,” he suggests. “And it’s a great story for DMs wishing to include more action-drama into their campaigns!”

## Daniel's Favorite Fictional Detective

*I grew up reading the Three Investigators books by Robert Arthur Jr., so they have a special place in my heart.*



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## BOOK 14: The Canopic Being by Jennifer Kretchmer

Meet the anthology of adventure authors who have gathered to tell the latest fifth edition tales—many of them new alongside the existing team.

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Jennifer is a writer, performer, consultant, and producer for television and tabletop gaming. Jennifer, who has Ehlers Danlos Syndrome, is also an advocate for disabled accessibility, inclusion, and representation in media and storytelling. She lives in Los Angeles, CA.

“It was incredibly exciting,” Jennifer Kretchmer says of being asked to be a part of *Candlekeep Mysteries*, before quickly adding, “it was also very intimidating and vaguely terrifying as someone who’s played D&D for almost 20 years and has an understanding and respect for D&D’s history. So many people who I adore have created this lore and I wanted to be conscious of that and honor it at all times, while also bringing something new and different to it.”

Her story, *The Canopic Being*, revolves around a worrying text that records a number of organ transplants. The adventure takes the characters all the way from Candlekeep to Tashluta, a temperate city built into the side of a volcano in Tashalar.

“You get to travel a lot in my adventure. I started playing D&D at second edition and we haven’t seen Tashluta in Dungeons & Dragons for a couple of editions. I was very excited to get to dive into a place that’s outside of the Sword Coast,” she says. “It was a lot of fun to tug on those threads and highlight some of the unique elements the area includes. One of those is a particularly interesting temple.”



Jen says it took a while to get to grips with the necessary text formatting requirements as a new adventure writer for Dungeons & Dragons. But that learning curve was nothing when compared with

the effort she put into her maps.

“I have visual spatial-processing issues, so I have a really hard time conceptualizing a dungeon—especially a nonlinear dungeon that’s multiple levels. I’m very, very proud of my map but it took an obscene number of hours to create,” she shares.

“I ended up printing out labels and attaching them to objects of varying sizes that were roughly to scale with the rooms. I then used string to tie those to a laundry drying rack. It was like a 3D version of the *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia* meme!

“I discovered very late in the process that if I worked isometrically instead of top down, I could actually draw maps. I also realize that I didn’t make it very easy on myself with some of the dungeon features. I was a little ambitious there for the first time out the gate, choosing to do something very complex. Next time it’ll be a house with no hidden doors, no traps, no stairs, no ramps, and just three rooms!”

Jen describes the project as “a phenomenal experience and a dream come true,” adding that it didn’t feel real at first seeing her name on the page of an official Dungeons & Dragons sourcebook. And if those printed words hammered home that her hard work had paid off and this was really happening, the images did an even better job.

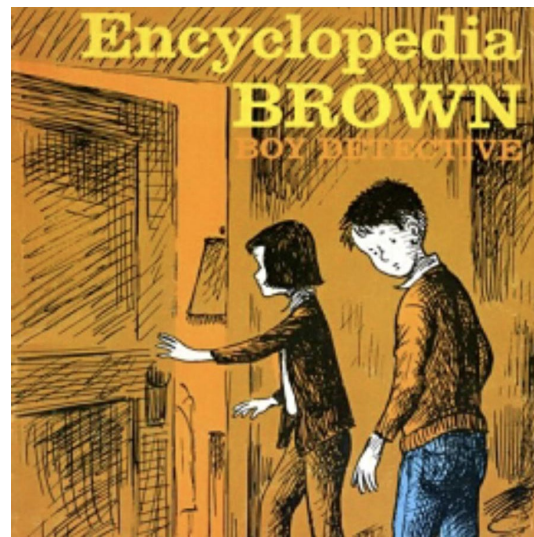
“They didn’t give me any warning that they were going to show me the art for my story. And I’m really glad my camera was turned off because I started to cry. Every time you’re writing as a DM, you dream about seeing what you’re writing in this particular D&D art style that you know in your bones. And to see images from your imagination recreated in that style is indescribable.”

## Jennifer's Favorite Fictional Detective

I’ve got to go with  
Encyclopedia Brown, who  
was a boy detective with a  
photographic memory. I loved  
those books as a kid. I really  
liked that it wasn’t one of  
those mysteries that was

impossible to solve until the detective came along with a key piece of information that you couldn't possibly have picked up along the way.

Leroy Brown would notice the things that I missed, but the books would drop enough clues that you could find them if you were paying attention.



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CANDLEKEEP MYSTERIES

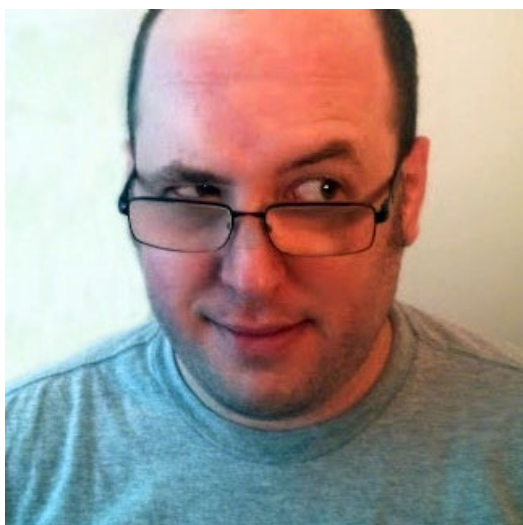
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## BOOK 15: The Scrivener's Tale by Brandes Stoddard

Meet the anthology of adventure authors who have gathered to tell the latest fifth edition tales—many of them new alongside the existing team.

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Brandes designed crafting systems in the video game industry. From there, he resorted to designing and running LARPs, then degenerated into freelance writing. He lives in Atlanta, GA, with his wife Rabbit, their two sons, and two cats.

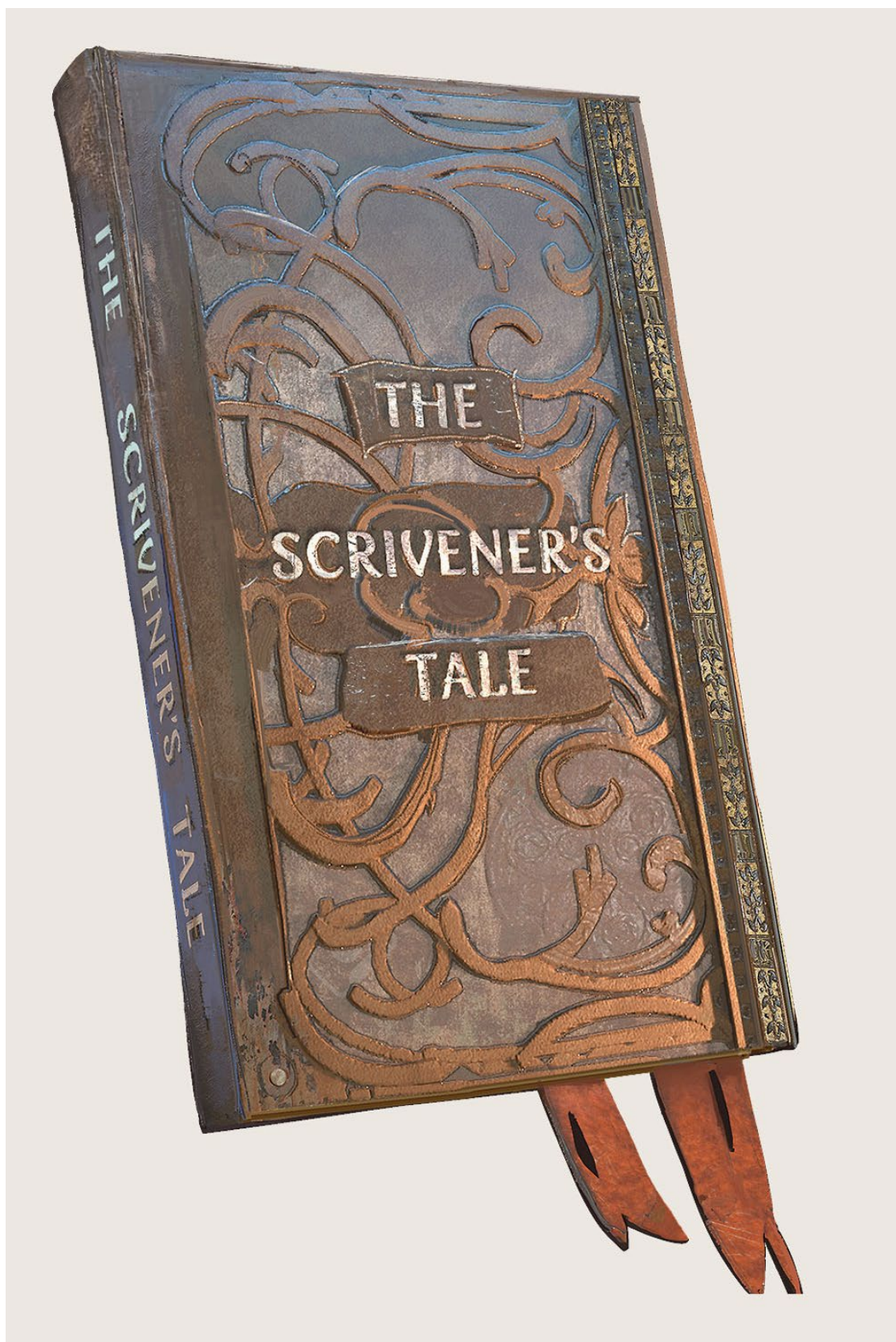
On January 24, 2020, before anyone really understood **what kind of year 2020** was going to become, Brandes Stoddard

received an email from Chris Perkins inviting him onto a project “based in Faerûn’s most famous library”. The process began with Chris sending him a document of Candlekeep lore, as well as other supplemental guidelines, and revealing the range he’d be writing for: Tier 3 (levels 11-16).

“I had the option to decline such a high tier, because it *is* a challenge to write at that level, but getting to play with and needing to account for higher-level powers sounded like fun to me,” Brandes tells *Dragon+*.

In *The Scrivener's Tale*, a tome leaves its magical mark on the

adventurers as they struggle to contain the evil archfey trapped inside it. The heroes must save themselves, as their journey takes them to the ruins of a forgotten kingdom and its ancient, subterranean library.



“I’ve always loved fey as part of fantasy adventure gaming, whether

we're talking about D&D or LARPing. I began by thinking about how an archfey could become a problem in a place as heavily protected as Candlekeep. There are a lot of great answers to that question and this is the adventure that fell out," Brandes says of his story.

"When one of the PCs reads from a cursed book, it turns out to be a lot more than just any old curse, as powerful fey get involved. Learning more about how the book came to Candlekeep leads the characters further into danger."

Brandes believes that adventure fiction, including adventure gaming, works best when there's a central question or series of questions to be answered. It doesn't have to include a murder for it to be a compelling mystery—just interesting questions and a burning desire to answer them.

"The biggest mystery I've solved as a D&D player is in the Planescape campaign where we stepped out into the streets of Sigil and everything we saw was off somehow. There was deep snow, Aoskar was being actively worshipped, and no one knew who the Lady of Pain was. From that point forward, my Sigil-born fighter struggled to understand what had happened to the city he knew, and it turned out that we'd slipped into a parallel reality where the Lady of Pain never took control of Sigil," he remembers.

"That was also a brilliant move by the DM. He knew that I was the only player in the group with any significant prior knowledge of Planescape lore, most of which I got from *Planescape: Torment*. I was the mouthpiece of what 'should' have been true—cue horrified reaction shots—while everyone else learned the alternate-reality lore right alongside me."

## Brandes' Favorite Fictional Detective

This may be a little obscure  
but my favorite is Detective  
Chief Superintendent  
Christopher Foyle, from the  
British TV series *Foyle's  
War*. Brother Cadfael,

especially as portrayed by Derek Jacobi, runs a close second. Both display dedication to their work and a powerful intellect, if not the near-superhuman intellect that Sherlock Holmes wields in

some stories. Foyle and Cadfael also hold my interest because of how their historical contexts inform their stories.



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CANDLEKEEP MYSTERIES

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## BOOK 16: Alkazaar's Appendix by Adam Lee

Meet the anthology of adventure authors who have gathered to tell the latest fifth edition tales —many of them new alongside the existing team.

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Adam has been a worldbuilder, story guy, character creator, adventure writer, and narrative designer for Wizards of the Coast for over 10 years. He likes all forms of cake and enjoys the silent wilderness, which constantly calls to him.

Adam Lee already has a head start clearing out Barovia. One of the biggest mysteries he's solved as a D&D player is figuring out how to defeat Strahd in Ravenloft.

“That was a big day,” he says proudly. “Oh, and by the way, in my game, Strahd is gone forever. Dead-dead, destroyed, never coming back. There's nothing worse than working hard to kill a villain and having it return. My brother ran me through an adventure where his villain, a total mind-melting jerk, could not be killed. We would kill him and then, surprise! It was a doppelganger! Surprise! It was wearing a mask! Surprise! It was a look-alike! Aaargh!”

Alkazaar, the author of *Alkazaar's Appendix*, has similar problems finishing a mission. In the book, he tells the reader about his ultimate

quest—the hunt for one of the fabled *nether scrolls*, which he was forced to abandon due to strange circumstances. He hopes that the reader will take up the call and clear up the mystery of the wandering stone golem in the desert of Anauroch.



“I’m a big Egyptology nerd, and I loved the idea of having an adventure set in the desert of Anauroch where the fallen empire of ancient Netheril lies under its sweeping sands. Indiana Jones is also a big influence on a good deal of my D&D writing because I think it has the right tone for D&D adventures and characters. There’s the warmth of Sallah, the awesome jerkiness of Toht, the badassery of Marion, and the overall pulp vibe of the world,” Adam explains, adding that *The Iron Giant* was also an inspiration.

“My main NPC in the adventure is a golem that the player characters have to find and learn about in order to complete their quest, and for this I drew on the Iron Giant—the machine with a heart of gold. I

love the idea of giving a construct feelings and loyalty. I also enjoyed making an NPC that primarily used sign language to communicate. I'm very interested to hear how DMs play the wandering golem and I hope it brings both depth and humor to the adventure."

Adam reflects that if he was running *Alkazaar's Appendix*, he'd use it to kick-start a wider Netheril campaign, where the outcome sets off a series of events that lead the party into an epic storyline in Anauroch and beyond. The potential prize on offer for characters who successfully solve the mystery is an extremely powerful magic item, matching the fairly high-level nature of the task.

"This adventure can be dropped in when the party needs an item matching that power level to solve a problem in the wider campaign, or it can be used as a parable for high-level adventurers who are wanting to fly too close to the sun in order to grasp at power. I have designed it so that, depending on the choices you make, it affects your player characters after the adventure is over in fairly significant ways."

## Adam's Favorite Fictional Detective

I'm a big fan of both Inspector Clouseau and Columbo. They're wildly different, but they both get the job done by being underestimated by their smarmy, egotistical foes (although arguments for Clouseau being a complete buffoon with no real sleuthing skills are fair). Columbo is whip-smart and has everyone figured out but doesn't let on.



© MGM

He wears his shabby clothes and watches carefully as he is judged as being a dolt by these hoity toity villains. But he's like a master puppeteer, playing them by using their judgement, arrogance, and egotism to spring a trap. It's brilliant. He's like if Socrates was a detective.



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CANDLEKEEP MYSTERIES

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## BOOK 17: Xanthoria by Toni Winslow-Brill

Meet the anthology of adventure authors who have gathered to tell the latest fifth edition tales—many of them new alongside the existing team.

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Toni is a supermom by day and a half-dragon by night, prowling the frosty reaches of Superior, WI. When not moonlighting as the Director of Research for a mergers and acquisitions firm, she works for Baldman Games as a project lead, writer, and editor.

“Every format has a place when telling stories, particularly in Dungeons & Dragons,” Toni

Winslow-Brill says when *Dragon+* asks about the mysteries she’s faced in game. “I’m a fan of them all and what I want on any given day depends on my mood. Some days I’m all about mysteries, some days it’s combat, some days the game might be something more straightforward, and others it might be pure roleplaying.”

For someone who likes to mix it up so much, there have already been some headscratchers to puzzle through in the campaigns Toni has been a part of.

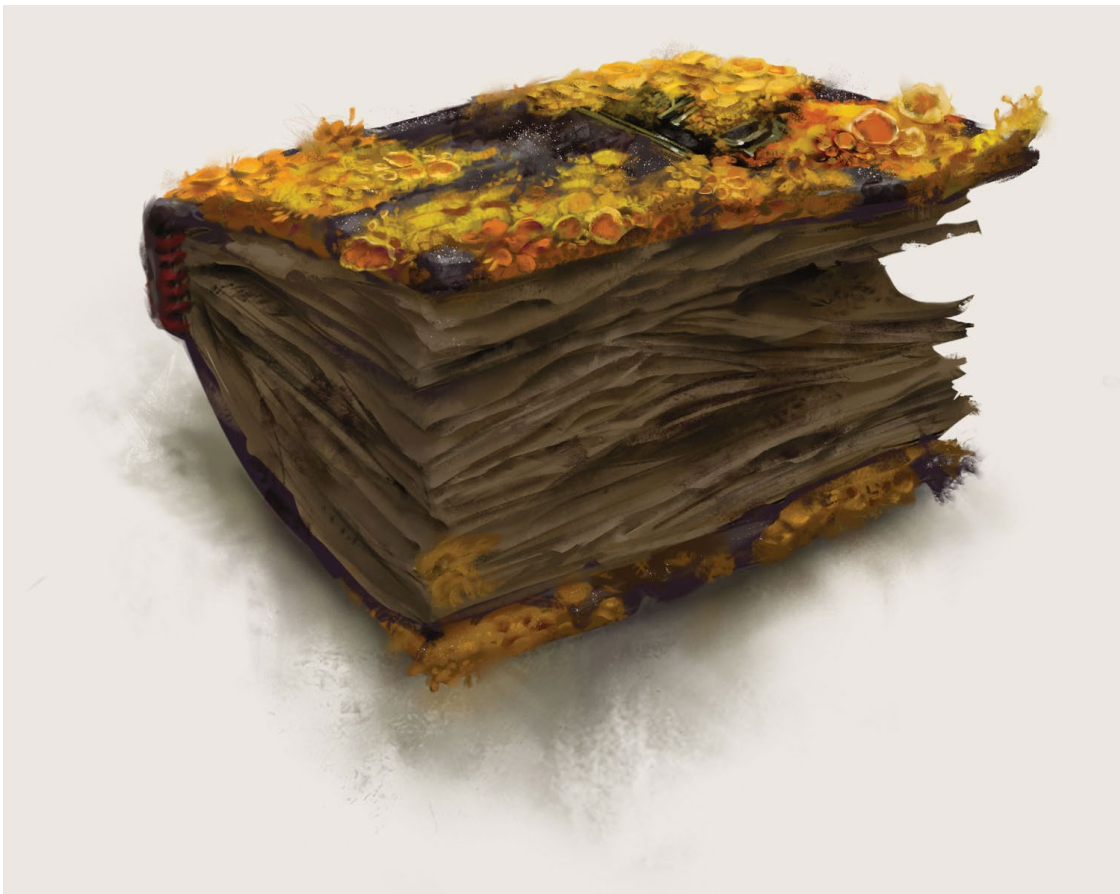
“One of the most interesting mysteries I’ve resolved as a player is the realization that the big baddie wasn’t who everyone thought it was, as

they were being directed by the fallen angel of the world's sun god and the angel was attempting to take over the rule of man. There was also the time we discovered that a kindly, old, grandmotherly leader of an elven clan actually derived her magic from the Far Realm and her true form had tentacles because of her contact with that plane. Gah!"

Toni's roles have seen her write and edit for various organized play programs (most recently the **Adventurers League**), as well as a few other projects, yet this is the first content she's produced for an official D&D publication. Helpfully, she already had the makings of an idea.

"While there was a different feel to writing this adventure, since it had to do with a mystery, the rest of the story was left to us to construct. Having that more open viewpoint really allowed my creativity to shine. My inspiration was an idea that I'd had floating about in my brain for quite some time that I hadn't had the chance to put down on paper yet," she remembers.

"Ideas morph and change as you go through the writing process. Some of the parts of the story that I really liked ended up not being used, because as I was writing I realized they didn't fit as well with the rest of the adventure. Others were cut for length—I am the first to admit that I can be a little verbose, so sometimes it was a struggle to stay within the required length for the adventure. That's how writing goes! I will save those bits as seeds for future adventure ideas."



The story elements that make up *Xanthoria* have been captured in a fell grimoire that details a deadly fungal plague. But “Xanthoria” is more than just the name of the book; it’s also the last word spoken by those who succumb to the plague. The word itself is synonymous with death, and those who pursue the reason why will need to be experienced adventurers.

“This adventure is designed to be dropped into any high-level campaign and the most challenging element of writing it was trying to nail the difficulty. Every party is different so creating an adventure that challenges most of them appropriately is often a tough target to hit. My first draft was a little too tough so I adjusted the difficulty.”

## Toni's Favorite Fictional Detective

*My favorite is Sean Spencer  
from the TV show Psych. The  
mysteries were always  
interesting, the stories fun,  
and I really enjoyed getting a  
good laugh as I watched it. I*

*was once told that I had the same sort of personality as Sean but I don't know if that's true. My young daughter occasionally points out to me that I'm not as funny as I think I am!*



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# IN THE WORKS



# PREVIEWS

## IN THE WORKS



# Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft



(Select to view)

Much like Thanos' quest to complete his jewelry collection in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, *Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft* may have been "inevitable", as Design Lead F. Wesley Schneider describes his colleagues as "a team full of horror fans who absolutely love Ravenloft."

Following the successes of *Curse of Strahd* (blending gothic horror and D&D), *Eberron: Rising from the Last War* (steampunk plus D&D), and *Mythic Odysseys of Theros* (Greek myth meets D&D), bundling together every possible flavor of horror with the world's

greatest roleplaying game should scratch a similar itch.

"Dungeons & Dragons has always been a horror game," Wes suggests. "Grabbing a sword, going into a creepy hole full of monsters, and not knowing whether you're going to come back out alive: That's absolutely a horror story."

When it comes to horror, there's no better D&D setting than Ravenloft. DMs and players might be most familiar with the setting's most famous corner, the domain of

Barovia, having campaigned against the infamous vampire Count Strahd von Zarovich. Yet the horrors that lurk in the Domains of Dread that make up Ravenloft are widespread. As outlined in the early boxed sets (*Ravenloft: Realm of Terror* and *Ravenloft*) and the second edition campaign setting *Ravenloft:*



*Domains of Dread* (first published in August 1997), Ravenloft is not a world in the traditional sense. This setting was described as a collection of domains ruled by Darklords, each surrounded by magical mists amid the vapors of the Ethereal Plane.

As its title suggests, *Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft* looks beyond Strahd to catalogue the threats posed by the other domains and their Darklords. While you might expect it to be written in the voice of famed monster hunter Dr. Rudolph van Richten, similar to how Volo and the Xanathar would pipe up in their guides, the book borrows from the pages of *Dracula* to introduce Ravenloft's terrors with correspondence between several different characters.

“Van Richten traces his roots back to Van Helsing from *Dracula*—a story comprised entirely of correspondence and journal entries,” Wes explains. “Now that our view of Ravenloft is expanding, we share a glimpse of some of van Richten's own exchanges with other heroes as he encourages them—and also all the players out there—to venture out boldly and confront the night.”

## HORROR HANDBOOK

*Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft* cracks open more than just the gothic horror crypt. Gothic horror is, of course, still a major element of Ravenloft, but cosmic horror, dark fantasy, ghost stories, occult detective stories, psychological horror, and more are now on the table. If you love any sort of horror, there's a Domain of Dread for

you.

“Finding the horror that’s right for you is a major element of the book. Your horror stories might feature cartoonish investigators hunting down mysterious monsters, or they might be more serious, suspenseful nightmares. The book discusses how to get your entire group involved in establishing guidelines and using safety tools to make sure everyone’s comfortable and enjoys the game. We provide frameworks to help make sure your horror adventures are fun, accessible, and safe, while also supporting players who voice concerns if things take an uncomfortable turn.”

## THE DOMAINS OF DREAD

“This incarnation of Ravenloft reimagines a great deal of what came before. Past explorations of the setting directly linked many of the domains of Ravenloft into a pseudo-continent called the ‘Core’. We’ve taken the Core, the heart of the Ravenloft setting, and shattered it. In this new interpretation, every domain is a lonely island drifting through the mists.

“Many of the domains get a modern-day brush up. We took the setting’s characters, locations, monsters, and other pieces, shook them up, and took some new directions. For example, in the ’90s, the domain of Falkovnia was a totalitarian regime ruled by a Darklord named Vlad Drakov, who had a Vlad the Impaler vibe. Well, we already have a Vlad-type figure in residence at **Castle Ravenloft** in Barovia, so we saw this as the perfect opportunity to give the domain a stronger identity and embrace a different brand of horror. In its new form, Falkovnia is ruled by a Darklord named Vladeska Drakov, a notorious military commander who’s struggling to defend its last surviving city against a domain-wide zombie apocalypse.”

## BUILD YOUR OWN DARK DOMAIN

“Well over a dozen domains get the spotlight in *Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft*, but with a whole chapter on making your own domains and Darklords, the book gives you the tools to unleash an infinite number of nightmare realms upon your game.

“In that chapter, we discuss the fundamentals of what makes a Ravenloft domain and how to create your own Darklord. Once you have those concepts, we explore a spectrum of horror genres to help inspire your own unique creations. Want a villain with a body horror



vibe in a cosmic horror setting where you can run occult detective stories? We give you the tools to build that terrifying story. Only once we've explained how to do all of that do we present domain after domain, by way of example.”



(Select to view)

## HERE BE MONSTERS

“The bestiary for Ravenloft is a *Who’s Who* of horror. It includes our favorite nightmares from Ravenloft’s past, as well as beings from folklore and urban legends. For example, longtime D&D fans might recognize monsters such as the carrionette and the gremishka from the second edition *Ravenloft Monstrous Compendiums*.

“Carrionettes are creepy marionettes that jab you with silver needles and swap consciousness with you, taking over your body and stranding you in a doll body! While gremishka are creepy gremlin-things that are allergic to magic. If you cast a spell on them, they might have an adverse reaction that includes potentially exploding into a swarm.

*Van Richten’s Guide to Ravenloft* also includes a number of new takes on various D&D monsters and horror staples, including a variety of new zombies and vampiric mind flayers.”



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## PLAYABLE MONSTERS

“*Eberron: Rising from the Last War* pulled a sideways horror move by including a construct person, a lycanthrope, and even a changeling, giving its race section a horror undercurrent,” Wes says, as he confirms that the Gothic Lineages published in *Unearthed Arcana* will appear in *Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft*.

“The fear of corruption, the fear of infection, the fear of change, those all play fascinating parts in many horror stories. *Van Richten's Guide* presents three new types of races called ‘lineages’ that play into those fears.

“The dhampir lineage has traits inspired by vampires, with a bite attack and the ability to feed off the living; the hexblood is tied up with fey magic and might be at risk of transforming into a hag down the road; while the reborn has died at some point and might take the form of a pseudo-undead creature or a Frankenstein's monster-style construct.

“One thing that makes these lineages different from other races is that you can gain them in the course of adventures. DMs aren't meant to impose these changes on players, but if an adventure develops in a way that such a change makes sense, it's a new—potentially terrifying—option the group might explore!”



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## DARK GIFTS

“In *Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft*, we present Dark Gifts. If you're familiar with the 'Piety' system in *Mythic Odysseys of Theros*, you'll be aware of its supernatural gifts. These are blessings from deities which provide a kind of mythologically themed superpower. *Van Richten's Guide* takes a twist on that concept, allowing characters to start out with a Dark Gift or gain one in the course of play.

“A Dark Gift is a horror-themed ability that offers a character a lot of upside. But, of course, there's a catch. Every Dark Gift provides a real benefit, but also a chance for something to take a sinister turn you didn't expect.

“For example, one Dark Gift provides you with memories from your past life, whispers of information you really shouldn't know. Sometimes these can be great—maybe you've never played the piano before but somehow when you sit down at the keyboard you can now play. By the same token, under certain circumstances, you might start having visions from past lives that distract you from what you're doing.

“Many Dark Gifts also provide grim roleplaying opportunities and ways to customize your character. You could certainly take those



memories I just mentioned and say they come from a past life. Or you could interpret them in a spectrum of different ways. Is there some mysterious intelligence that's been merged with your own? Or is an alien entity communicating with you, sneaking memories into your head? It's your choice. Each Dark Gift is the first line of a horror story. It's up to you to decide the full tale of terror you want to tell."

*Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft* is released May 18, 2021 with an MSRP of \$49.95. Preorder a physical copy at your [local game store](#), bookstores such as [Barnes & Noble](#), or online at retailers such as [Amazon](#). Also available as a digital version at [D&D Beyond](#), Fantasy Grounds, and [Roll20](#).

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## IN THE WORKS

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# Dark Alliance



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*Dark Alliance* is gearing up to bring the world of Dungeons & Dragons to life as an explosive action RPG. Filled with real-time combat and dynamic co-op, it sees powerful frost giants and vengeful dragons roam unchecked through Icewind Dale, as invading armies grow stronger every day.

Thankfully, rogue Drizzt Do'Urden and his legendary Companions of the Hall—ranger Catti-brie, fighter Bruenor, and barbarian Wulfgar—are on hand to bring video gamers together as they bring down monsters. Made famous by author R.A. Salvatore, each of these warriors carries their signature weapons: Drizzt dual-wields scimitars; Catti-brie has her trusty bow; Bruenor has his battle axe;

and Wulfgar, son of Beornegar, has a sturdy and colossal war hammer.

“If you’re familiar with the D&D multiverse and R.A. Salvatore’s bestselling *Legend of Drizzt* series, you’re going to see some familiar faces,” says Kevin Neibert, Lead Game Designer at Tuque Games. “The events in *Dark Alliance* take place during *The Crystal Shard*, which is the fourth book in the series. Kessel’s army, which was empowered by Crenshinibon, has been defeated and the crystal shard is lost once again in Icewind Dale. Various villains have been drawn here by the power of Crenshinibon and are attempting to find it so they can wield it as a weapon.”

*Dark Alliance* promises frantic action, as the heroes try to repel the onslaught of creatures and humanoids. Those who accept this quest can fight side-by-side as the four playable characters, either online or locally on the same console or PC.

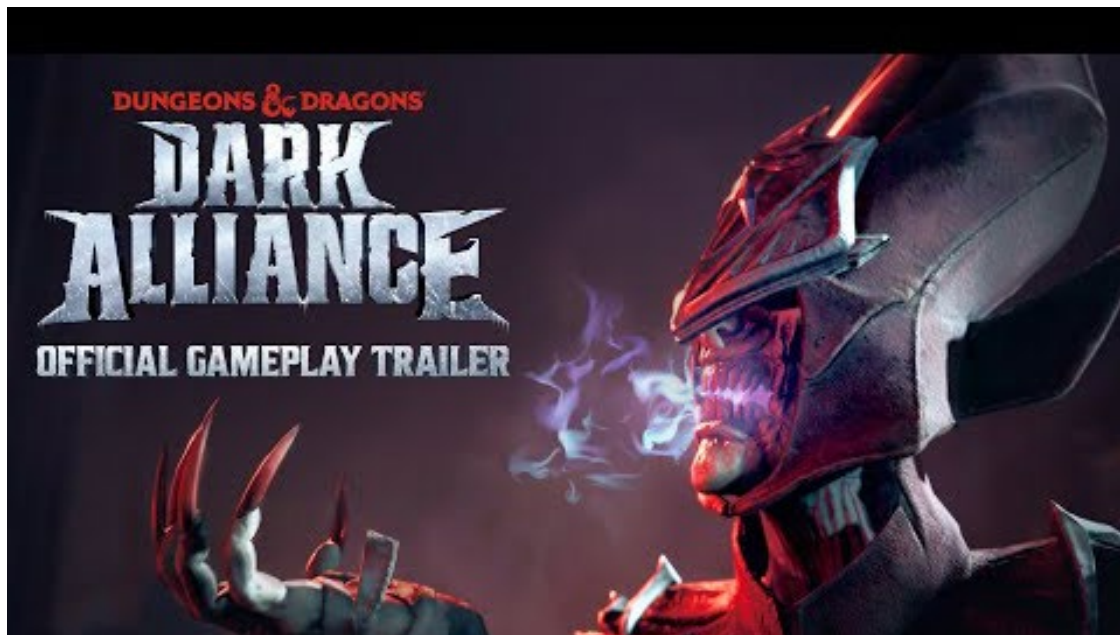


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## Meet iconic monsters.

“We’re trying to capture that moment in D&D when the Dungeon Master says, ‘Roll initiative!’ While *Dark Alliance* is not a turn-based game and all the action is happening at the same time, we’ve tried to stay as true as possible to D&D lore with our own interpretation of the fifth edition rule set,” Kevin tells *Dragon+*.

“A cinematic moment sets up each mission, introducing its villains. We’re very proud of how we’ve been able to breathe life into the various monster factions, showcasing some of their traditions and culture. As you play through the game, you’ll learn a little bit more about each of them.



“For example, the verbeeg exist within D&D lore and are a common villain in Drizzt’s world, but this is the first time that they’ve been created in high-fidelity 3D environments. We worked with the D&D Team and used old *Monster Manuals* and previous editions of the rules to create this version of the verbeeg. As a designer, it was a very cool experience.

“As part of the lore system within the game, there are plenty of scrolls, tablets, and paintings to find, all made available in the player journal that’s accessible in Drizzt’s base camp in Kelvin’s Cairn. They provide lots of information to sink your teeth into, including background about the settings, the characters, and the villains. These are hidden everywhere, scattered across the map.”





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## Choose your hero.

“We refer to the fighting system in *Dark Alliance* as ‘emergent combat’. We’ve connected all the different moves together, so players don’t need to memorize a list of inputs in order to trigger different combos. This is important to us, as we want our players to feel powerful but still feel immersed in the game.

“You can play as one of four distinct characters, each with their own unique playstyle and customizable abilities. As you might expect, Drizzt Do’Urden is highly mobile and agile, and being one of the best swordsmen in the Forgotten Realms is a precise and deadly fighter with a high rate of attack. He performs unique attacks following a dash and is the only hero who can link three dashes together.





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“Drizzt’s *blink* ability also makes him invisible, so monsters can’t target him. That allows him to sneak up behind them and deal automatic critical damage. And his *cloud of daggers* deals damage over time in an area around him. Those daggers are sharp, and they’ll apply the bleeding condition to a monster, affecting a high percentage of their health as they bleed out.

“Meanwhile, Wulfgar is a wrecking ball. He’s a massively powerful barbarian, swinging a heavy warhammer. He’s great at cracking monster defenses by tossing them in the air or knocking them on their back, leaving them open for follow up attacks. And Bruenor Battlehammer’s tough as nails, with a lot of armor and high amounts of health. With some aggro and threat-management abilities, he’s the perfect tank for your party.

“And, of course, Catti-brie has her own abilities. Her *ensnaring strike* summons roots from the ground to grapple opponents. The grappled condition lasts from five to ten seconds and makes it a lot easier to beat up on the target. She can also heal using her aura.

“When the yellow bar at the bottom left is full, players can activate a character’s ultimate ability. For example, Drizzt has an onyx figurine in his pocket, which summons Guenhwyvar from the Astral Plane to pounce on any nearby monster.”



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## **Complete missions and vanquish bosses.**

“Each of the seven major quests is a standalone sliver of the game with its own storylines, monsters, and bosses. Each quest is made up of three missions, so there are twenty-one levels to play through in total. Of those seven quests, four of them are story quests and three are dungeons. The dungeons are designed to be more challenging, with a more elaborate boss fight at the end. That’s where you’ll find creatures such as the beholder and the dragon.

“Every time you complete one of the quests, you get a bronze statuette version of the boss you defeated at base camp. You’ll see some familiar monster archetypes among those boss trophies, including a lich, a frost giant, a verbeeg, a goblin, and a duergar.

“Bosses aren’t the only monsters you’ll need to look out for. For example, a goblin captain will inspire other nearby goblins to fight a little harder. If you take out the goblin captain first, the other basic goblin warriors may lose their nerve and run away, disrupting their attack.”



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## Arm your party.

“It was really important to us to create the best possible cooperative experience. When you find a chest or a purse of gold, we’re going to share that loot together. That works even if the players are on opposite sides of a level. And if a monster drops a bow, only the player in control of Catti-brie can see it and pick it up. So, you don’t have to worry about your friends accidentally stealing your loot.

“There are between four and five checkpoints throughout each of the missions, usually appearing after major combat encounters. These allow you to respawn in that location if you’re knocked unconscious later in the mission. They also give you the option to take a short rest and replenish all your potions, abilities, health, and stamina.

“If everyone is low on potions, and some of your allies are low on health, it might be a good opportunity to regenerate fully. But if you’re still in really good shape, you can forego the short rest and gain a different bonus. Skipping the rest provides a better chance that dropped items will be rarer, earning powerful gear to take on even bigger challenges.”

**Third-person action RPG *Dark Alliance* is coming to PC, PS4, Xbox One, PS5, and Xbox Series X on June 22, 2021. It has been rated M for mature and you can preorder the digital edition of *Dark Alliance* for \$39.99 online at the official **Dark Alliance****

**website**, or preorder the standard edition and retail-exclusive steelbook edition for \$59.99 at select retailers.



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## IN THE WORKS

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# Neverwinter: Sharandar



(Select to view)

Having asked its players to make the perilous descent into **Avernus** to face the hordes of Hell, it was time for a new direction in the *Neverwinter* massively multiplayer online roleplaying game. Will a trip to the Feywild prove less deadly than a destination teaming with demons and devils? Perhaps not....

With the aid of heroes from the city of Neverwinter, the Iliyanbruen elves previously defeated the armies of **Malabog**, the fomorian king, who threatened the Feywild home of Sharandar. But the peace didn't last and new threats have emerged, luring the heroes back with the promise of epic boss battles and new treasures. Dare you reenter the Plane of Faerie?



(Select to view)

“Neverwinter’s heroes aided the Iliyanbruen fey and have worked to establish a peace and a rapport with those in the surrounding region. Then Sharandar’s people start disappearing,” reveals Randy Mosiondz, Lead Designer for *Neverwinter*. “The fey reach out to warn that something bad is happening. They’ve seen dark forces moving again in the forest. They need to know if the heroes can provide aid once more.”

*Dragon+* sat down with Randy and his colleague Matt Powers, Lead Producer for *Neverwinter*, to find out what this new expansion means for the future of the MMORPG. They explain why we should be excited for this latest expansion and share seven cool things to look out for in *Neverwinter: Sharandar*.





(Select to view)

### 1. A Familiar Face

Merrisara Winterwhite is one of the first characters the players encounter in New Sharandar as part of *Neverwinter's* Feywild-themed campaign. Yet even seasoned heroes may not instantly recognize her, as she's undergone a visual update since the war against Malabog.

“Merrisara has done a lot to keep her people together after all these years. She’s a no-nonsense leader,” Randy says, explaining that her new look exemplifies her position as the commander of New Sharandar and the leader of the Iliyanbruen elves.

Players should ensure to seek her out and pay their respects as she will personally send them on several quests in the region. Old and new faces alike also share their wisdom on the ongoing problems for visitors. One NPC the creators were hyped to talk about is a merchant called Thradisar Starwise.

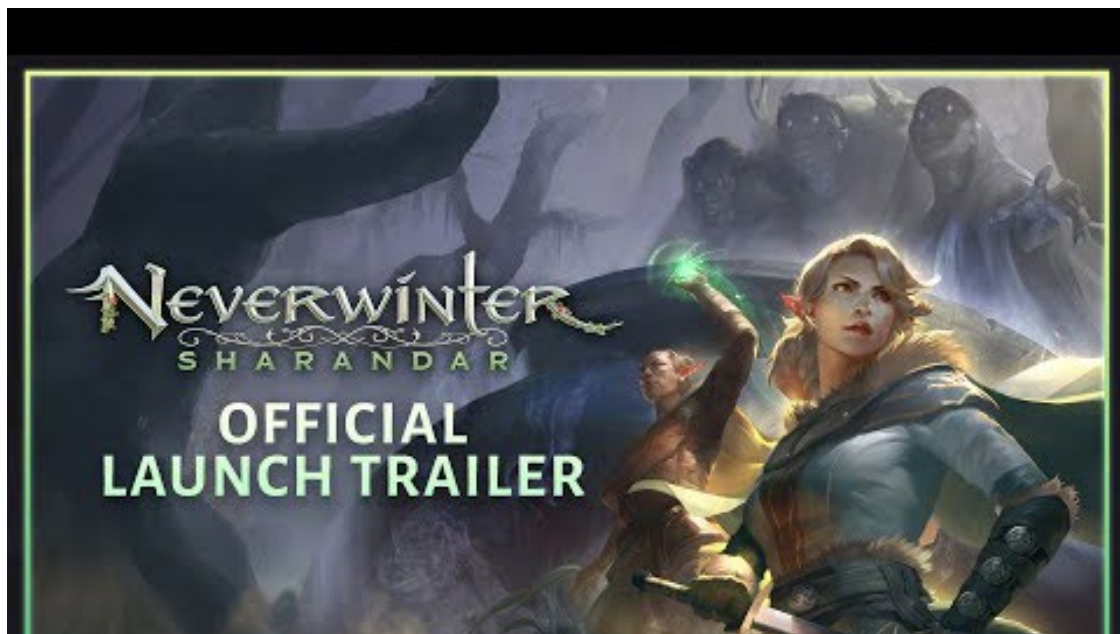
“Thradisar is the leader of the Arcane Collective. He’s actually a bit

more snarky than lighthearted, but the Iliyanbruen are a serious bunch,” Randy says, as Matt responds, “We might have to add a jovial drunken satyr in there somewhere to shake up the earnest tone of the Feywild in a future update!”

## 2. Renovation Innovations

New Sharandar, a city rebuilt by the Iliyanbruen elves that sits halfway between the mortal realms and the world of the fey, serves as the social hub for this *Neverwinter* expansion. Malabog may previously have tried to destroy the location, but the region has thrived and expanded, undergoing a visual revival that improves the city’s look in particular.

“Our environmental artists did a fantastic job,” Randy says proudly. “The updated social hub is gorgeous and it really evolves the world, showing what the Iliyanbruen elves have achieved after the war with Malabog.”



## 3. A Discovery of Hags

Malabog may be gone but a new threat has arrived to stir up trouble in the Feywild. As seen in the teaser trailer above, the power of the elves is a draw for hags, who wish to steal it for themselves.

“These are the main enemies of *Neverwinter: Sharandar*’s three episodes, each with their own style,” Randy says, praising the work of the character art team. “These hags are creepy, powerful, and a lot of fun to fight.”





DUNGEONS  
& DRAGONS

Neverwinter  
SHARANDAR

(select to view)

The first member of the coven the players will encounter is an annis hag. Tall, imposing, and definitely not to be underestimated, these hags back up their magical abilities with a brutish strength that allows them to deal damage even when their magical abilities fail.

There are rumors that annis hags modify their bodies through horrid practices, and that ogres and trolls are drawn to their side. If either of those are true, players are in for a dangerous time.

#### 4. Royal Rumble

Until now, the individual known as the Queen of Air and Darkness has kept to herself. As heroes in the *Neverwinter* MMORPG step into the Feywild once more, it seems she's decided to grace them with her presence.

"The players will have a brush with the Queen of Air and Darkness. She's an arch-fey of terrible power," Matt confirms, before revealing that she's not the only one of her kind they'll run into. "They'll also meet the Prince of Frost," he divulges, although he says exactly how he's involved is a secret the players must discover for themselves.

That meeting with the Queen of Air and Darkness will take place at the Vault of Stars, which Randy describes as one of the most difficult dungeons ever created for *Neverwinter*.

"The major forces within the Feywild occupy the Summer Court and

the Gloaming Court, and the Queen of Air and Darkness rules the latter. The Vault of Stars is deep within the Gloaming Court,” Randy says.

## 5. Gear of War



DUNGEONS  
& DRAGONS

NEVERWINTER  
SHARANDAR

(Select to view)

“If you want the best gear in Sharandar, you will need to visit the Vault of Stars. The villains you face there give you the means to obtain the *forest guardian’s raid scale mail*,” advises Randy. And while Matt agrees that the *raid scale mail* is worthy of seeking out, he also notes that the crone’s gear “looks wonderfully frightful.”

Randy is also excited about what he describes as the *refulgent diamond pin artifact*: “In your adventures in the magical wilderness, you may find mysterious *shattered diamond shards*. If you gather enough, you’ll be able to combine them to create this new diamond artifact set.”



DUNGEONS  
& DRAGONS

NEVERWINTER  
SHARANDAR

(select to view)

## 6. Displacement Activity

Neverwinter players also finally get to go toe-to-paw with a classic D&D creature for the first time: “We have wanted to include displacer beasts in the game for some time and when we decided to return to the Feywild, we knew we had to add them,” Matt imparts.



(Select to view)

## 7. Quantum Leap

New Sharandar isn’t the only part of the region to get a facelift, as a large amount of the Feywild has also undergone an upgrade, with the environmental artists on the *Neverwinter* team improving everything from the zones to the dungeons. But the modernization didn’t stop there.

“We’ve updated the look,” elaborates Matt. “Fourth and fifth edition D&D had different art styles, especially for critters like the fomorians and the cyclops. Many of the new creatures you are facing, from the hags to the displacer beasts, follow the most recent edition’s art style.”

***Neverwinter: Sharandar* is available on PC now, and is coming to PlayStation and Xbox at a later date. Players can begin their adventure for free at the [official Neverwinter site](#).**

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## IN THE WORKS

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# Warriors of Waterdeep: Vajra Safahr

Regular visitors to Waterdeep may be aware that Vajra Safahr runs Blackstaff Academy, a school for mages, out of Blackstaff Tower in the Castle Ward. She is also in charge of Force Grey, an order of highly skilled adventurers who are called upon to defend the city in times of need. And she's coming to *Warriors of Waterdeep* as a playable character.



Vajra is a capable wizard in her mid-thirties, and is the youngest person ever to hold the position of Blackstaff. As the High Wizard of Waterdeep, she is charged with using all the magic and resources at her disposal to defend the city against threats.

“Vajra’s character in *Warriors of Waterdeep* draws upon the different roles she plays within Waterdhavian politics—first in her clandestine activities as a field agent, then leader and commander of Force Grey/The Gray Hands,



(Select to view)

and also in her public standing as Archmage of Waterdeep,” says Stephen David Wark, Brand Manager at game developer Ludia.

“Vajra is a human wizard, and the second wizard in the game.

Compared to **Shevarith**, Vajra has a different approach to magic, focusing less on powerful single strikes and more on boosting allies. Although she’s still being

capable of casting a memorable fireball when the need arises.”

## NEW ABILITIES

Vajra introduces three exciting new abilities to *Warriors of Waterdeep*: Secrecy, Command, and Summon.

- **Secrecy** is a buff that proves information is power by temporarily concealing a hero’s buffs from opposing players. For example, if Tommus has Regenerate and Counterattack as active buffs, and then gains Secrecy, his tooltips and status icons will only show information about Secrecy, and the other effects will only be seen when they are triggered in-game. Opponents will need to be observant and keep track of Tommus’ buffs on their own. In addition, heroes and monsters who can steal buffs are unable to steal them from heroes protected by Secrecy.
- **Command** is an ability that emphasizes teamwork and tactical positioning. Think of it as a friendlier version of Dominate. Vajra can mark an enemy on the battlefield and command all available allies in range to perform a free basic attack on the target. The allies can then continue to act on their turn in the initiative order as normal. The right command at the right time can swing the battle in your favor.

- **Summon** is an ability that brings reinforcements to the battlefield—in Vajra’s case, *Bigby’s hand*. Vajra casts the iconic D&D spell from her legendary spellbook and places *Bigby’s hand* on the battlefield as an additional ally. The summoned hand acts as a new hero, with its own place in the initiative order and its own set of abilities to move to a new position, and push, pull, or taunt the enemy. *Bigby’s hand* can’t be damaged or killed, but only remains on the battlefield for a limited number of turns or until Vajra is defeated.

“Vajra’s abilities help her to protect her allies and let heroes with weaker defenses maximize their number of attacks during the game. She works best with heroes with ranged attacks, or multiple melee attacks, such as Naomlen or Shevarith,” Stephen adds.





(Select to view)

## WEAPONRY

Vajra was handpicked for the job of Blackstaff by Khelben Arunsun, who derived his name and the title of the office from his weapon. Khelben's spirit (as well as the spirits of all the other Blackstaffs who preceded Vajra) is contained within the staff, and Vajra rarely makes

a decision without first soliciting their advice.

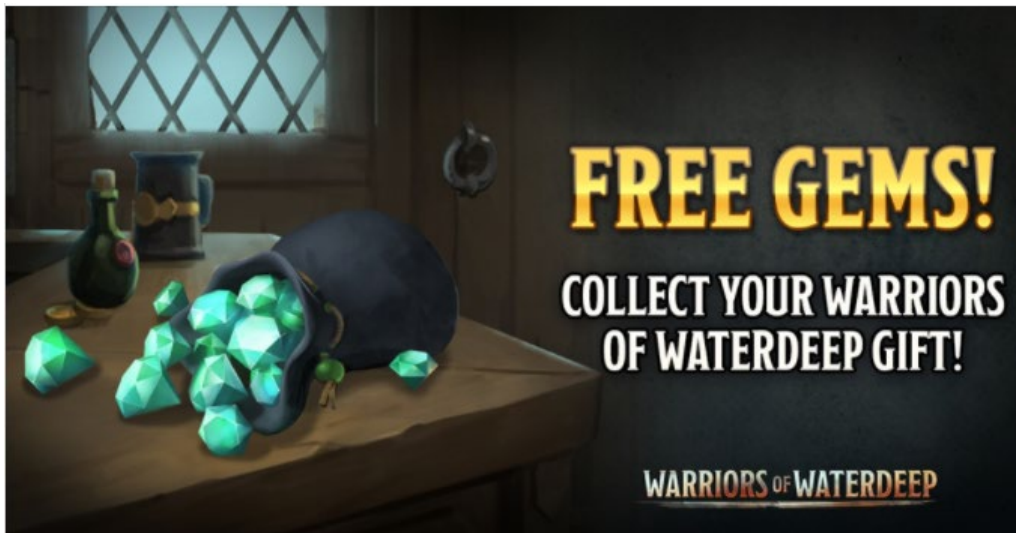
As well as wielding the *Blackstaff* itself in game, she also brings a number of recognizable and fearsome staffs and rods with her into *Warriors of Waterdeep*. These include the *staff of power*, the *tentacle rod*, the *staff of withering*, and the *rod of rulership*. She also has a staff of her own creation—the *Greystaff*—from the early days of her Force Grey adventures. Laeral Silverhand, the Open Lord of Waterdeep who crafts hard-to-acquire gear for the heroes in the game, has also designed a special weapon for her friendly rival... to be revealed in due time.

Vajra will be available for early access starting in March. Her recruitment is based on an exploration event instead of a PvP event, beginning in May to coincide with *Warriors of Waterdeep*'s second anniversary.

As an iconic hero like **Jarlaxle**, Vajra will not be available as a renown reward, so players who miss early access or the first recruitment event must wait until the next recruitment event for the opportunity to add her to their roster. Once Vajra is recruited, a special training theme event is unlocked to give players a chance to test out her new abilities and earn bonus gear.

## FREE GEMS!

Our friends at Ludia are gifting 50 gems to every reader who clicks on **this link**. You must have completed your first battle in *Warriors of Waterdeep* and you must click the link on the mobile device where the game is installed, as it will open the game to deliver the reward.



*Warriors Of Waterdeep* is available now for **Android** and **iOS** devices as a free download with in-game purchases.

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## IN THE WORKS

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# In the Works: Baldur's Gate III

Something big is coming to *Baldur's Gate III*—and we're not talking about the druid who's wild shaped into a polar bear! Larian Studios used its [Panel From Hell 2 livestream](#) to update fans on all the latest news from the game, which is available in Steam Early Access, including that new playable druid class. And Larian confirmed that its latest update (codenamed Patch 4: Nature's Power) will offer more new features when it launches than were included in all three previous patches combined.

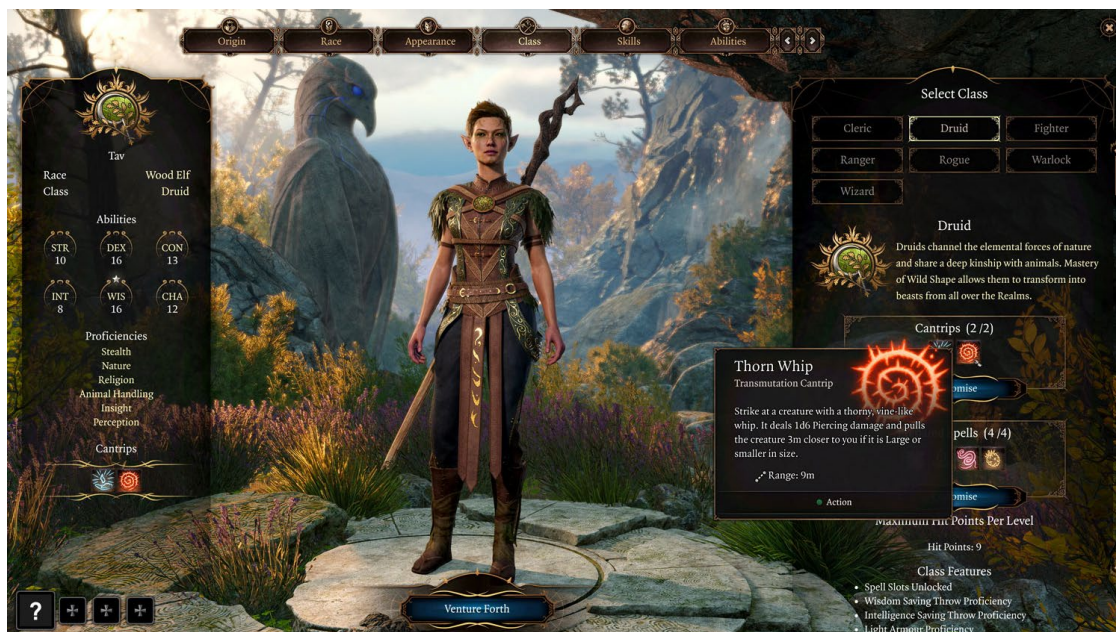


## DRUIDS

The druid class comes with over 30 spells and abilities, including wild shape. With the power of the wilderness at their fingertips, druids can transform their shape in order to adapt to different situations. They can crunch bones and slam into enemies as larger creatures, spin silken thread as a spider, sneak into spaces as a cat or



soar above as a raven, and burrow under the earth and ambush opponents as a badger. Druids can also temporarily embrace the tadpole that the mind flayers have implanted inside them to discover a mysterious “aberrant” shape.



The eight options available in *BGIII* once this patch rolls out are: deep rothé; cat; raven; dire wolf; badger; spider; polar bear; and aberrant. NPC’s will react to your animal form in a procedural way. Bear blocking your path? Assume bear shape and ask them to move!

New dialogue has been recorded to give druids the same level of narrative interactivity as the other classes. Those who visit Druid’s Grove playing as a druid may also enjoy a game of spot the difference, with the option to win new rewards.

Druids in D&D traditionally come from a particular “circle”. Players will be able to choose from one of two circles to inform their play.

**Circle of the Land:** Keepers of the old faith, these druids are connected to arctic wastelands, sunny coasts, scorching deserts, forests, grasslands, mountains, treacherous swamps, and even the vast and otherworldly realm of the Underdark. They gain additional powers based on the type of geography they’re connected to.

**Circle of the Moon:** Changeable as the moon, these stewards of nature haunt the deepest parts of the wilderness. Transformation is no problem for most druids, but those who keep the ways of the moon

gain the ability to morph into more powerful combative wild shapes, such as the polar bear.



## OTHER MAJOR CHANGES

Patch 4: Nature's Power brings a number of other improvements to the game, including increasingly polished cinematics, major quality of life improvements, and fixes. Many of the new additions have been requested by Early Access players or influenced by community feedback.

**Optional Loaded Dice:** This change helps smooth out the extremes of play by making sure several dice results in a row are not very high or very low. Dice rolls in dialogue are treated differently to those in combat, and this change only impacts the d20, not damage dice.

**Speak with dead:** Cinematics in special cases such as *Speak with dead* have been greatly improved, and druids can also join conversations as an animal. Major improvements have also been made in animation and lighting.

**Multiplayer:** Those embarking on adventures together can now see another player's equipment, spells, inventory and character sheets. They can also place items into and take items from another player's inventory. The ability to lock players out of this function will be added to a future patch. Until then, you have to trust your friends not to steal your items!

**Quality of life:** A series of much-requested features allow players to target friends and enemies with spells and equipment by clicking on their portraits, as an alternative to trying to click on a character in the world. Using torches has never been easier thanks to the long-awaited addition of the torch button. And tactical geniuses can now withdraw even quicker thanks to the “flee” button!

*Baldur's Gate III* is available on **Steam Early Access** now. Gather your party and subscribe for *Baldur's Gate III* updates at the **official website**.



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## D&D Dinner Date: Heroes' Feast

When that important celebration or intimate night in has to take place in the courtesy of your home, the authors of the D&D cookbook have your back.

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**A**s we continue to fashion entertainments within our homes—a key skill of any D&D fan, even if that now includes traditional out-on-the-town celebrations—who better to consult on creating the perfect D&D date night dinner than the authors of *Heroes' Feast: The Official D&D Cookbook*? Whether you're preparing for the Feast of Love in Silverymoon or simply cooking a romantic meal for a



loved one at home, Michael Witwer, Jon Peterson, and Kyle Newman know how to make the evening feel like a special, immersive dining experience. And that begins long before the stove is fired up.

“Think about the way you dress the table, and the napkins you pick. Get the elements right and it will transport you to an in-game location,” says Kyle, recommending you put in the same level of preparation as a devoted Dungeon Master adding cool props and world-defining elements into their campaigns.



‘Dragon Salmon’ (Select to view)

“There are a bunch of different ways to bring people into the moment,” Jon agrees. “We’ve seen a lot of people on social media sharing amazing pictures of how they’ve presented the food in



*Heroes' Feast*. For example, the lighting that they choose can add atmospheric touches, such as using little lanterns rather than candles.

“Your presentation might depend on which items you’ve already accumulated as part of your fandom. Think about your tableware—do you own cutlery that looks rustic or mediaeval? Perhaps choose a glass that looks more like a goblet, so it appears like something that might exist in a fantasy universe.”

With that in mind, be sure to keep **Starbucks coffee cups** of the table and out of shot!



‘Vedbread’ (Select to view)

No matter your budget, it’s possible to add innovative touches to

embellish the dishes themselves. Anyone who's soaked paper in tea or coffee to create an aged scroll for players to read in-game will be able to transfer those skills into making a parchment-style menu, for example.

"Creating an element such as the menu helps set a certain vibe and allows your guest to ease into the experience," Kyle says, while Michael adds that such an item might also be used to inform your guest on the mythos behind the meal.

"Each recipe in the book has a note about where you'd find it in the D&D universe. These notations are supposed to both educate and hopefully appetize," he explains. "You might also read these descriptions as you present each course, as a sommelier would describe the wine at a fancy restaurant."

## FOOD GLORIOUS FOOD

Having delivered style tips to help these sumptuous recipes look like they've been whipped up in the kitchens of The Yawning Portal tavern, the *Heroes' Feast* team turns to the best menu choices for a charmed evening.





‘Wood Elf Forest Salad’ (Select to view)

“I would start with the ‘Wood Elf Forest Salad.’ It’s an infused wild-leaf medley with vibrant citrus accents, but what’s wonderful about it is the presentation—the finishing touch is a sprinkling of edible flowers. It’s a great way to include a romantic floral element that tastes delicious too,” Michael says, also recommending that the addition of a side of flavorful butternut squash ‘High Harvest Puree’ to the ‘Dragon Salmon’ makes for a “killer pairing” as a main course.





‘Qualinesti Vegetable Stew’ (Select to view)

“I can also recommend the ‘Qualinesti Vegetable Stew’ as an alternative vegetarian option for the main,” adds Jon. “It’s a light course for a romantic dinner, with a classic ratatouille-style presentation that’s both colorful and beautiful.”

For dessert, however, the authors suggest things get a little more random. After all, what would a D&D date night be without a game element?

“Why not take out a d4 and ask your partner to roll?” Michael says, suggesting you have a few options ready to serve. “The result can determine the choice of one of four dishes, all of which provide a great end to the meal.





'Meals End' (Select to view)

“On a one, serve up the whipped cream meringue elven dessert of the ‘Meal’s End’, which is light and delicious. On a two, the halfling dish of ‘Honey-Drizzled Cream Puffs’. If it’s a three, go with ‘Cocoa Broth’—this espresso-infused cocoa drink ensures that you won’t fall asleep if you decide to watch a movie together afterwards!”

Jon picks the fourth option: “If you’ve got a real sweet tooth, I suggest the ‘Barovian Butterscotch Pudding.’ It’s described in the book as a dish as sweet and smooth as a tall chalice of owlbear milk. And for a dessert aperitif try the ‘Zzar’—a creamy nut drink with a vibrant aftertaste that’s a staple in bars in northwest Faerûn.”



'Barovian Butterscotch Pudding' (Select to view)

## ROLL KITCHEN INITIATIVE

Finally, don't forget to be prepared! "A lot of these dishes are lavish meals that require a significant amount of preparation. Make sure you have all the ingredients that you need on hand, and work out your timings," Michael reminds.

"A really useful note to take is, clean as soon as you finish something," Kyle adds, quoting from an excerpt of the *Codex of Eldritch Cuisine* that appears in the cookbook, containing handy pointers for budding chefs who don't have the *unseen servant* spell on hand. "You're always going to have a spare minute or two during the cooking process. You might as well use those to get ahead of the

cleaning so you can enjoy the rest of the night.”

***Heroes' Feast: The Official D&D Cookbook* is available now with an MSRP of \$35 (**hardcover**) and \$14.99 (**Kindle edition**)**

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## Character Spotlight: NPCs

Max Dunbar and Adam Lee unveil a major new collaborative series for Dragon+.

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**W**hether it's forming the perfect crew to pull off an audacious heist or ganging together to defeat the big bad, collaboration sits right at the heart of Dungeons & Dragons. And the D&D Team loves to see new partnerships come together for that very reason. Yet it's a rare treat when the conjunction of art and words is so well matched it's as if peanut butter met jelly for the first time on the same piece of bread.

“It was seeing all of the art Max was sharing on Instagram that inspired me to reach out to him,” Adam Lee remembers, as he explains his new partnership with Max Dunbar for *Dragon+*. “Richard Whitters would send me a text and say, ‘Have you seen Max’s latest thing?’ Especially the series for Inktober where Max drew **a whole party**. Seeing all of these characters made me want to write about them.”

To be fair to Adam, there was a lot of art to pour over. The rate at which Max creates characters bursting with personality suggests some kind of superpower worthy of a spot at the Xavier Institute.



(Select to view)

“Coming up with random characters is a good way to warm up. And I like drawing them for fun in my free time to scratch that itch,” Max explains. “I was at a point where I thought how awesome it would be to take these characters and drop them into little adventures or encounters and develop them further, when Adam and I first talked about working together on this project.”

What started out as a simple exercise in building NPCs quickly escalated into a major new endeavor. As the pair discussed which characters to develop for inclusion in *Dragon+*, a fusion of art, story, and game mechanics took place.

One such character was master of potions Grabitha Grindleclaw. While Grabitha does not come from the pages of the recently announced *Van Richten’s Guide to Ravenloft*, this new hag NPC would certainly fit into your Ravenloft campaign!

“There was a back and forth and sometimes we worked on ideas Adam had written and sometimes Adam’s ideas came from what I had drawn. For example, the hag was Adam’s idea and the chest of vials on her back came from his description. I then added what I thought would be a bunch of weird but cool little knickknacks, like that ladle with the teeth. Then Adam takes that and makes this amazing story element out of it,” Max shares.

Inspired by Baba Yaga’s hut, hags are also often associated with vehicles, and the paired imagined the kind of transportation their hag Grabitha Grindleclaw would use. Max pictured a little contraption of some type and as the pair discussed it further their hive mind turned that into an animated cauldron.





DUBAR

(Select to view)

“She’s already sitting on her potion mixer, perched on its edge. And when Max draws the cauldron, he puts these awesome, stubby legs on it. And suddenly she’s riding along on an armored vehicle that she can duck inside when she needs to fight, with attacks pinging off of it,” Adam says with a smile.

“Working with Adam, figuring out all these new angles to put on these characters, has been next-level fun,” Max adds. “I constantly want to see what he’s come up with. I hoped that this would be a



really cool collaboration and I'm so thrilled that it's turning out to be even better than I could have imagined."

"We hope the D&D community will be vocal and tell us if they really latch onto a character," Adam requests. "If they decide they love our dwarf bounty hunter, there's the possibility of putting him into a short story, with Max drawing him doing this, that and the other. Or if they love getting stat blocks, adventure hooks, and NPC bios, we're ready to give them whatever content they're hungry for. The possibilities are endless!"

**Adam and Max's first collaboration for *Dragon+* includes dwarf bounty hunter (and member of The Fathomless) Hieronymus Black, monster hunter for hire Yahira Silverblade, and potion master Grabitha Grindleclaw.**

[DOWNLOAD THE NPCs](#)

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# HIERONYMUS BLACK

Hieronymus Black is a dwarf bounty hunter who operates almost exclusively underground as a member of the Fathomless—a guild of expert subterranean hunters known for tracking down those who think they can disappear into the dark places of the world. In the manner of an old gunslinger of the Wild West, Hieronymus is a dwarf of few words who easily sees through fast-talking scalawags and weaselly cutthroats. He has a strong dedication to a job well done, and won't compromise his integrity for anything—not even gold.

Hieronymus rides through the catacombs and grand caverns of the Underdark on his faithful mount, Maybelle—a deep rothé adapted to the pitch darkness of subterranean life. Maybelle is trained for hunting fugitives, and she works like an extension of Hieronymus to chase down quarry and bring the wanted back to the Fathomless—dead or alive.

Hieronymus has friends and connections throughout the subterranean world, especially among the drow. Far from the influence of Lolth's infamous sects of zealots, countless peaceful drow enclaves and villages can be found throughout the Underdark, and Hieronymus has little patience with those who view his friends as potential enemies—or who traffic in old prejudices.

## THE FATHOMLESS

The Fathomless are a guild of bounty hunters trained to survive in even the most challenging subterranean environments. When criminals flee to places where the law of the surface realm cannot go, the Fathomless take up the chase.

Members of the Fathomless are always on the lookout for candidates to join their guild, and they actively recruit adventurers who they think would be a good fit. The members of the guild share no specific ethos or morals. In the end, it's money that talks, and many ask few questions about the jobs they're assigned. Adventurers who have proven their ability to face the worst threats in cramped passageways a mile underground might attract the attention of a member of the Fathomless guild—followed by an invitation to join.

In Faerûn, the Fathomless actively work throughout the Underdark and in the dungeons of Undermountain, and the guild holds maps to many of the labyrinthine catacombs beneath major cities such as Baldur's Gate, Neverwinter, and Waterdeep. As guides, compatriots, or information brokers, members of the guild might be a resource for characters preparing to undertake a major dungeon delve. Alternatively, the Fathomless might be antagonists to a party—racing through the Underdark to get to the same prize the characters are seeking.

Further members of the Fathomless will appear in upcoming issues of *Dragon+*!

## HIERONYMUS'S GEAR

Hieronymus makes use of all kinds of special gear when stalking and taking down his quarry.

### KLEAVER

This custom-built oversized knife unleashes deadly slashing damage, backed up with a pulse of magical destruction.

### OL' BESSIE

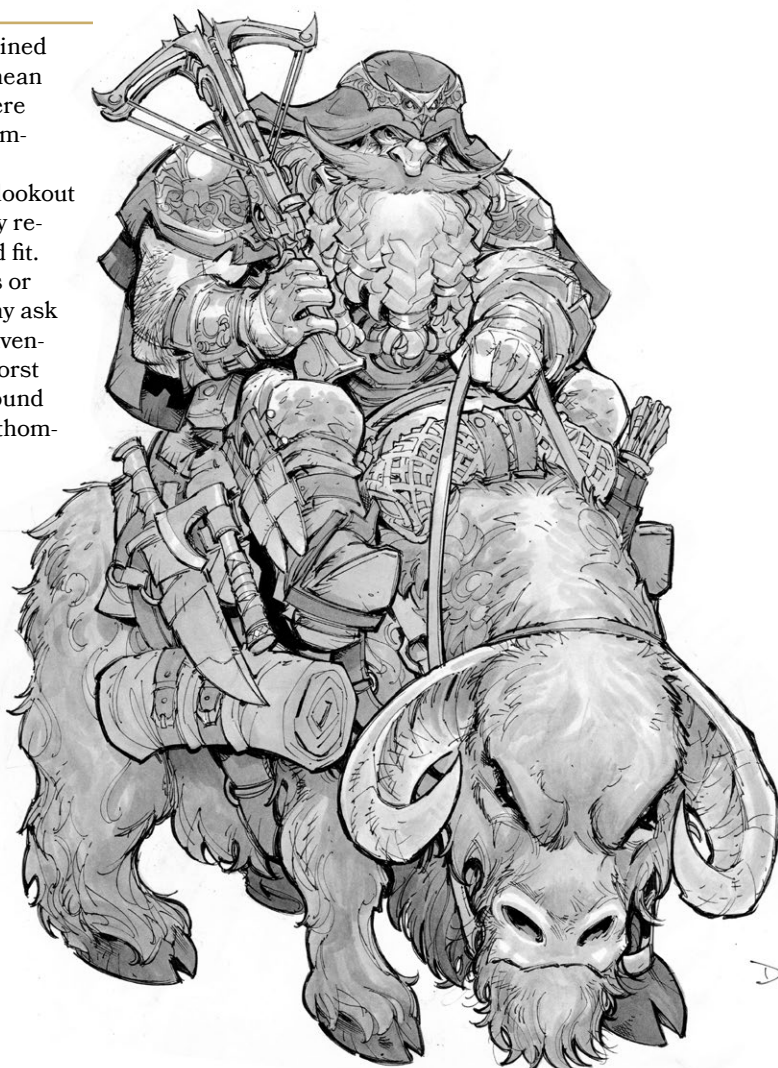
This magic crossbow gives Hieronymus a forceful edge in combat as it knocks foes off their feet.

### SPIDERFANG BLADES

Hieronymus carries a number of these balanced throwing knives, whose poison paralyzes targets to take them out of the fight.

### HEADBAND OF THE BAT

While wearing this headband, Hieronymus has blindsight out to a range of 120 feet and a +3 bonus to Wisdom (Perception) checks. He loses both these features if he becomes deafened.



## PAULDRON OF THE SPIDER

Forged by a drow armorsmith, this shoulder plate was given to Hieronymus as payment for taking down an assassin of Lolth targeting the leader of a drow village. While wearing the pauldron, Hieronymus has a climbing speed equal to his walking speed, and he can move up, down, and across vertical surfaces and upside down along ceilings while leaving his hands free.

## MAYBELLE

Maybelle is Hieronymus's deep rothé companion, and the one creature he truly counts on. Keeping Hieronymus safe is a full-time job for her, and she has saved the dwarf's life more than once. Like most deep rothés, Maybelle is stubborn and grumpy as a rule, but those who get to know her understand that there's a heart of gold underneath that shaggy coat.

## USING HIERONYMUS IN YOUR GAME

In an adventure or a full campaign involving the Underdark, Hieronymus Black might end up crossing paths with the characters in any number of ways.

### REQUESTING AID

The characters are on a mission to slay a dangerous subterranean monster. Any search for special equipment or resources leads them to the Fathomless, and to Hieronymus. The dwarf might become a source of information and lore, a broker for needed magic and equipment, or a guide prepared to lead and fight alongside the characters in their quest.

## MAYBELLE

*Medium beast, unaligned*

**Armor Class** 10

**Hit Points** 13 (2d8 + 4)

**Speed** 30 ft.

| STR     | DEX     | CON     | INT    | WIS     | CHA    |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|--------|
| 18 (+4) | 10 (+0) | 14 (+2) | 2 (–4) | 10 (+0) | 4 (–3) |

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

**Languages** rothés communicate with each other using their *dancing lights* innate spell

**Challenge** 1/4 (50 XP)

**Proficiency Bonus** +2

**Charge.** If Maybelle moves at least 20 feet straight toward a target and then hits it with a gore attack on the same turn, the target takes an extra 7 (2d6) piercing damage.

**Innate Spellcasting.** Maybelle's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom. She can innately cast the following spell, requiring no components:

**At Will:** *dancing lights*

### ACTIONS

**Gore.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

## CHANCE MEETING

While journeying through the Underdark, the characters need to choose between a long, safer route and a potentially dangerous shortcut, but time is of the essence in their journey. From out of the shadows, Hieronymus Black appears and offers to guide them along the dangerous route—for a fee.

## HIERONYMUS BLACK

*Medium humanoid (dwarf)*

**Armor Class** 16 (half plate)

**Hit Points** 93 (11d8 + 44)

**Speed** 25 ft., climb 25 ft.

| STR     | DEX     | CON     | INT     | WIS     | CHA     |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 16 (+3) | 12 (+1) | 18 (+4) | 12 (+1) | 16 (+3) | 16 (+3) |

**Saving Throws** Str +6, Dex +4, Wis +6

**Skills** Insight +6, Perception +9, Stealth +7, Survival +6

**Damage Resistances** poison

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., blindsight 120 ft., passive Perception 19

**Languages** Common, Dwarvish, Undercommon

**Challenge** 5 (1,800 XP)

**Proficiency Bonus** +3

**Dwarven Resilience.** Hieronymus has advantage on saving throws against being poisoned.

**Second Wind (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest).** As a bonus action, Hieronymus can regain 20 hit points.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Hieronymus can attack three times with Kleaver or throw two spiderfang blades.

**Kleaver.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage plus 4 (1d8) force damage.

**Spiderfang Blades.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. While poisoned in this way, the target is paralyzed. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

**Spiderthread Net.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 20/40 ft., one Large or smaller creature. *Hit:* The target is restrained. A creature can use its action to make a DC 17 Strength check to free itself or another creature in the net, ending the effect on a success. Dealing 20 slashing damage to the net (AC 15) frees the target without harming it and destroys the net.

**Ol' Bessie (Heavy Crossbow).** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d10 + 1) piercing damage plus 6 (1d12) force damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.



# YAHIRA SILVERBLADE

Yahira Silverblade is a monster hunter for hire. This well-equipped elf travels from city to town to village, following stories and rumors of monstrous trouble so that she might ply her trade and earn another sackful of loot.

Yahira is not much for words. But when she does open her mouth, she's a straight talker who's all about business. A student of her craft, she has extensive knowledge regarding aberrations, monstrosities, and the undead, with a special focus on fighting fiends of all kinds. But she is always on the lookout to learn more, and if someone wants to get her attention, the best way is to talk about fighting monsters—especially a monster she hasn't previously heard about.

## MAGIC ITEMS

Over long years of hunting monsters, Yahira has picked up a few unique magical tools of the trade.

### FIEND-FORGED PAULDRONS

The shoulder plates of Yahira's scale mail were forged in the Abyss and the Nine Hells, and instantly translate any speech in Abyssal and Infernal by whispering it to her in Elvish.



## YAHIRA

Medium humanoid (elf)

**Armor Class** 16 (scale mail)

**Hit Points** 52 (8d8 + 16)

**Speed** 30 ft.

| STR     | DEX     | CON     | INT     | WIS     | CHA     |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 16 (+3) | 15 (+2) | 14 (+2) | 15 (+2) | 14 (+2) | 17 (+3) |

**Saving Throws** Dex +4, Con +4

**Skills** Athletics +5, Nature +4, Perception +6, Survival +4

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

**Languages** Common, Elvish

**Challenge** 4 (1,100 XP)

**Proficiency Bonus** +2

**Fey Ancestry.** Yahira has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put her to sleep.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Yahira makes two melee or ranged attacks.

**Fuerza (Greatsword).** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) force damage.

**Radiant Dagger.** *Ranged or Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage, plus 7 (2d6) radiant damage.

## REACTIONS

**Parry.** Yahira adds 3 to her AC against one melee attack that would hit her. To do so, she must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

### PLANE SHIFT RING

Yahira wears a magic ring that allows her to cast the *plane shift* spell to chase down monsters across the multiverse. Once the ring is used in this way, it cannot be used again until the next dawn.

### LIONESS BROOCH

The magic of this brooch, which is carved as the head of a lioness, allows Yahira to cast the *true seeing* spell. Once the brooch is used in this way, it cannot be used again until the next dawn.

### RADIANT DAGGERS

The matching pair of *radiant daggers* Yahira wields were given to her by a holy order of clerics, as payment for hunting down a fiend that plagued their abbey.

### FUERZA

Yahira's magic greatsword is named Fuerza—an ancient heirloom that is now her only reminder of her family.

## USING YAHIRA IN YOUR GAME

Yahira can be used in a number of ways in your campaign, most easily as a helper or a competitor to the characters.

### HELPER

In the role of a helper, Yahira might be a specialist NPC brought into the party to help defeat a particularly tough monster—or she could be a stranger who comes to the aid of the characters when all seems lost. She might be an acquaintance or friend of one of the party members,



who owes that character a favor. She can also be a resource for information to a group of adventurers about to embark into the Abyss, the Nine Hells, or some other deadly realm, sharing the secrets she has learned about fighting fiends, undead, and more. Yahira could also accompany the party as a guide to dangerous extraplanar sites, cheerfully telling horrific stories about monsters to put the characters (and the players) on edge before a big battle.

### COMPETITOR

As a competitor, Yahira could be hired to seize a bounty that the characters are also after. Her employer might be the wealthy rival of the party's patron, in a scenario where both employers are vying for the rare treasure or magic item the monster possesses. For a humorous start to the interaction, you can have Yahira better outfitted all around than the characters, so that if they have an ornery donkey and a cart, she has a noble Clydesdale and a wagon. If the characters' gear is showing wear and their patron has gifted them with only common magic items to help in their quest, have Yahira show off her gleaming scale mail and a healthy supply of alchemist's fire, potions, scrolls, and more. The monster hunter might lord it over the characters at first, but then become an ally and a resource when she and the characters establish a common cause.

# GRABITHA GRINDLECLAW

The green hag Grabitha Grindleclaw lurks in the middle of a dank and dangerous swamp with her toad familiar, Wart. She's a collector of rare mushrooms, monster parts, extraplanar flowers, and magical spices, which she stores in the drawers of a wooden medicine chest she carries on her back. With the right ingredients, Grabitha can brew any potion imaginable in the magic cauldron she rides. If an adventurer brings her something special such as a roper's tongue or a moth's breath flower, Grabitha might take a liking to them and brew something to order. But be forewarned! Grabitha keeps a close eye on her business partners, and characters who aren't careful might find themselves turned into the ingredients for one of her more fiendish concoctions.

## GRABITHA'S GEAR

In the course of the countless bargains she's made with mortals in her lifetime, Grabitha has come to possess an assortment of magic items and strange curios.

### THE GALLOPING CAULDRON

The *galloping cauldron* is a magic iron pot, forged by a night hag coven from the iron bones of a fallen titan. Grabitha won the cauldron in a fiendish game of rattle-skulls—and narrowly escaped a grisly death at the hands of the night hags, who still seethe over the loss to this day. She uses the *galloping cauldron* to brew her elixirs and potions, with its magic infusing her brews with increased potency. The *galloping cauldron* also acts as her main mode of transportation, and she rarely leaves her perch on its lip. When she needs to move fast, Grabitha hops inside the pot, shakes the ropes, and clicks her tongue. The cauldron then takes off like a shot, its squat legs galloping tirelessly day and night.

Only Grabitha knows the Sylvan command words to activate the cauldron, which has the following features:

- It has Armor Class 16 and 150 hit points.
- It has a speed of 30 feet.
- It is immune to poison and psychic damage.
- It understands Abyssal and Sylvan but can't speak.

### CHATTERTOOTH THE SHRUNKEN HEAD

This magical shrunk head is named Chattertooth, and it normally lives up to its name with its constant bantering. Grabitha limits Chattertooth to blinking and making muffled sounds by binding the head's mouth with gauze wrappings. Despite this, the hag often talks to Chattertooth, and responds as if she can understand what the shrunk head is saying.

### GRABITHA'S LAMPREY LADLE

Grabitha's *lamprey ladle* operates as both a serving ladle and a deadly weapon. In response to its user's mental commands, the ladle manifests a ring of fangs along its spoon-shaped head that can clamp on to hapless victims. The handle of the ladle is a magical gullet of sorts, which greedily sucks the blood from the body of its victim and gives life force back to its wielder.

### MEDICINE CHEST

The drawers and cubbyholes of Grabitha's magical medicine chest are filled with all kinds of strange ingredients, and just about every spell component a wizard could imagine. And if Grabitha doesn't have it, she knows just where to get it.

### WART

Wart has been Grabitha's toad familiar for as long as she can remember. Wart uses the **frog** stat block, and understands Common and Sylvan but cannot speak. (Grabitha can understand Wart's croaks and chirps fairly



well nonetheless). The toad helps Grabitha fetch items from her medicine chest, as his sticky feet are perfect for grasping slippery bottles, popping open cork stoppers, and rifling through cluttered drawers.

## USING GRABITHA IN YOUR GAME

Grabitha can be used as the centerpiece of a fun encounter for a lower-level party of adventurers. As a green hag, she's powerful enough to command respect but not so powerful that she sees the characters as insignificant. And for higher-level adventurers, Grabitha can be an NPC resource that they must seek out for her formidable brewing skills.

Like most hags, Grabitha is an exceptional source of information. She knows where many monsters have their lairs, and where many rare and unique magical reagents and alchemical ingredients can be found. You can play Grabitha as a kindly grandmother, or as a straight-up hag who wants nothing more than to inspire tears and mayhem. Even as a foil to the characters, though, Grabitha doesn't need to be evil, so feel free to make her fit your campaign's story however you'd like.

### SHOPPING LIST

Grabitha loves to take advantage of most adventurers' desire for interesting challenges—or their need to make some coin to fund their next expedition. She's always in search of the best ingredients for her brews, and is quite willing to tell a group of fresh-faced adventurers where and how to get them. Once they bring her the items from her shopping list, Grabitha is willing to pay them for their help with a few lesser potions or one powerful potion that can aid the characters on their future quests.

Use the Grabitha's Shopping List table on the next page to select the ingredients she needs the characters to find, or as inspiration for ingredients of your own.

### A PARTY'S BEST FRIEND (FOR A PRICE)

If the characters have a need for a magic potion or strange alchemical substance to unlock a secret, provoke a vision, or solve a problem, you can have rumors send them to the dark swamps to look for Grabitha. There, the characters must bargain with the hag for the things they seek.

You can set up that Grabitha is the only one who knows how to make the particular potion, elixir, poultice, or philter that cures a specific disease, opens a magic door, or removes a curse. Grabitha is always up for an alchemical challenge, so all the characters need to do is tell her what they require. She can then figure out what ingredients she needs to craft a brew that packs a real punch—and what favors she'll ask for in return.

### GRABITHA'S POTION MASTERY

Grabitha's signature ability allows her to make any potion in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. However, with the help of her galloping cauldron, she is also able to make unique

## GRABITHA GRINDLECLAW

Medium fey

**Armor Class** 17 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 82 (11d8 + 33)

**Speed** 30 ft.

| STR     | DEX     | CON     | INT     | WIS     | CHA     |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 18 (+4) | 12 (+1) | 16 (+3) | 17 (+3) | 14 (+2) | 14 (+2) |

**Skills** Arcana +5, Deception +4, Perception +4, Stealth +3

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

**Languages** Common, Draconic, Sylvan

**Challenge** 3 (700 XP)

**Proficiency Bonus** +2

**Amphibious.** Grabitha can breathe air and water.

**Mimicry.** Grabitha can mimic animal sounds and humanoid voices. A creature that hears the sounds can tell they are imitations with a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check.

**Innate Spellcasting.** Grabitha's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 12). She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

**At will:** *dancing lights*, *minor illusion*, *vicious mockery*

### ACTIONS

**Claws.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) slashing damage.

**Grabitha's Lamprey Ladle.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d4 + 4) piercing damage, and the ladle attaches to the target. While the ladle is attached, at the start of each of Grabitha's turns, the target loses 5 (2d4) hit points due to blood loss. If the target loses hit points this way, Grabitha gains 5 hit points (up to her hit point maximum). Removing the ladle requires a successful DC 15 Strength saving throw made as an action. If Grabitha commands the ladle to detach (no action required), it instantly returns to her hand.

**Illusory Appearance.** Grabitha covers herself and anything she is wearing or carrying with a magical illusion that makes her look like another creature of her general size and humanoid shape. The illusion ends if Grabitha takes a bonus action to end it or if she dies.

The changes wrought by this effect fail to hold up to physical inspection. For example, Grabitha could appear to have smooth skin, but someone touching her would feel her rough flesh. Otherwise, a creature must take an action to visually inspect the illusion and succeed on a DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check to discern that Grabitha is disguised.

**Invisible Passage.** Grabitha magically turns invisible until she attacks or casts a spell, or until her concentration ends (as if concentrating on a spell). While invisible, she leaves no physical evidence of her passage, and can be tracked only by magic. Any equipment she wears or carries is invisible along with her.

**Potion Mastery.** Once per day, if she is in possession of the right ingredients, Grabitha can create any potion in the *Dungeon Masters Guide*.

potions, limited only by your imagination. All you need to determine is how difficult it is to obtain the ingredients. Grabitha tasks the characters with collecting for her—and the more powerful the brew, the more dangerous getting those ingredients should be!

### GRABITHA'S SHOPPING LIST

| d12 | Ingredient                                    |
|-----|---|
| 1   | A vial of basilisk blood                      |
| 2   | A tuft of troll hair                          |
| 3   | Shed snakeskin from a medusa's hair           |
| 4   | A feather from a cockatrice                   |
| 5   | Donkey cap mushrooms from the Feywild         |
| 6   | A toenail from a lich                         |
| 7   | Scales from a merrow king                     |
| 8   | A feather from a pegasus                      |
| 9   | Wine from the court of the Pixie Queen        |
| 10  | A finger from a wight                         |
| 11  | A chunk of purple amethyst from the Underdark |
| 12  | A captive will-o'-wisp                        |

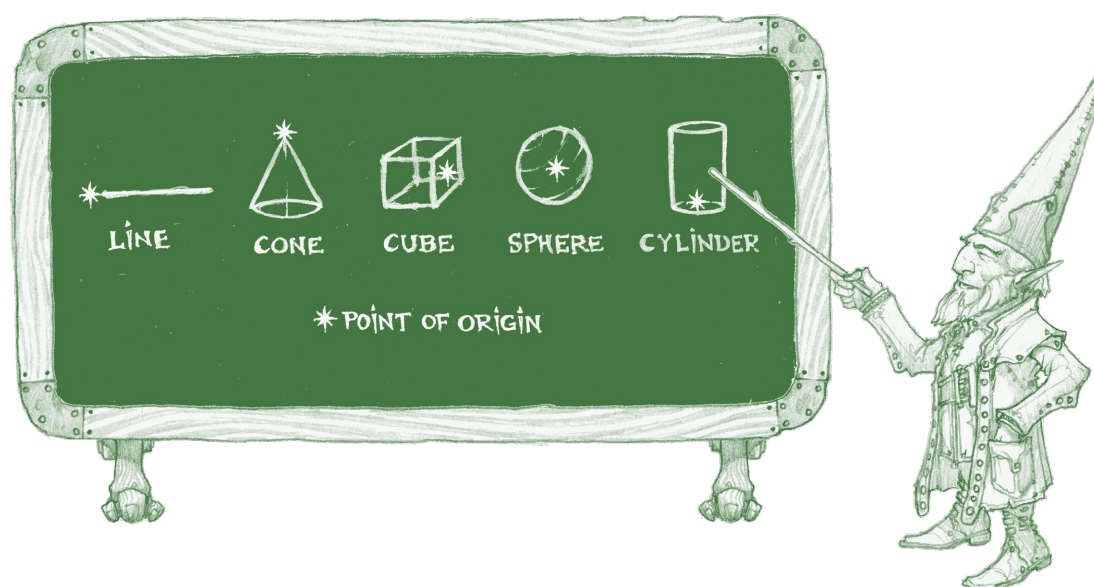


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## D&D After School

Stefan McNinch worked a little after-school magic with an innovative Dungeons & Dragons program to set the kids involved on the path to success, Jane Hoskyn reports.

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**I**t makes sense that a game involving dice and numbers might help students make sense of math. But would you believe it can also aid young people's confidence and teamworking skills, explain advanced business situations, and set children with special educational support on the path to high school graduation?

That was the experience of educator Stefan McNinch, a lifelong roleplaying fan who spent years running after-school groups in Austin, Texas. He'd already witnessed the impressive results his post-class coaching in volleyball and chess could achieve, but even he was amazed by the impact his D&D club had on its teams of boys and girls. He introduced students from third through to fifth grade to Dungeons & Dragons, some of whom have carried the hobby with them into middle and high school.

“The kids came from a wide range of backgrounds, interests, and

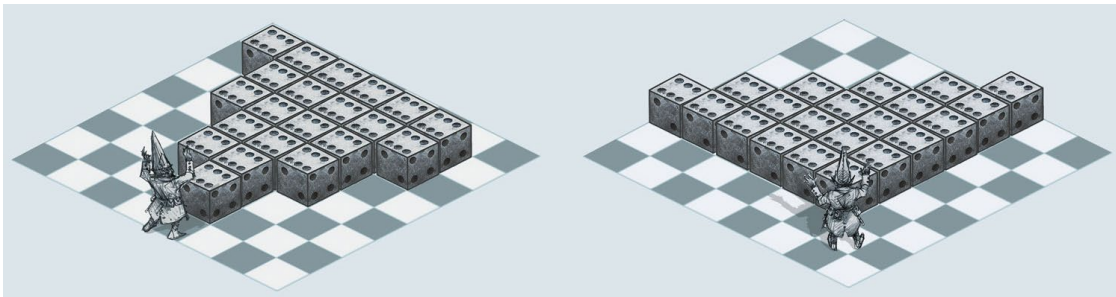




Stefan McNinch

academic levels. But I saw these very different kids becoming much warmer towards one another as the game humanized them to each other,” Stefan tells *Dragon+*, adding that after five years the club has had an effect on their academic progress that is nothing short of magical. “All of those students are now on track to graduate and one of the moms is

so happy that her son is graduating with honors. And that boy has already accumulated two years’ worth of college credits.”



## CLUBBING TOGETHER

It all began in 2012 when Stefan was hosting a chess club for third-graders and one of the boys came up with the idea of an after-school D&D group.

“The student who approached me had enjoyed playing D&D with his dad. He had a group of friends who read fantasy books—they were big fans of *Lord of the Rings*—so he wanted to introduce them to the game,” Stefan remembers.

“I’ve always been a champion of after-school activities. These programs are key in reducing at-risk behavior in that window before kids’ parents are able to finish work. There were plenty of sports activities at the end of the school day, but not so much for some of the quieter, more bibliophile types of kids to take part in. I thought it was a great idea.”

The boy who suggested the idea was rewarded with the honor of DMing the group's first D&D campaign, before Stefan took the reins and became the Dungeon Master for every campaign in the five years that followed.

"It made more sense for me to handle the improv and admin that goes along with being the Dungeon Master. I wanted to slowly increase the difficulty in line with their strengths and weaknesses as players and characters, while keeping the story streamlined," he says, admitting that it took him more effort than the young players to know every inch of the D&D world they inhabited, as their imaginations were so adept at immersing them in the magical universe they were creating.

"Kids get totally absorbed in the worlds they create because letting their imaginations go wild and crazy comes so naturally. And they really invest themselves in a game, emotionally."



## SCHOOL OF D&D

The advancement system in Dungeons & Dragons also gave many of Stefan's students their first experience of being marked up, not down. He found that not only did this positive reinforcement boost the kids' confidence, it also encouraged them to take risks.

"In school, a student's score starts at 100 and is marked down from that. D&D is refreshing because you count up instead, gaining levels,

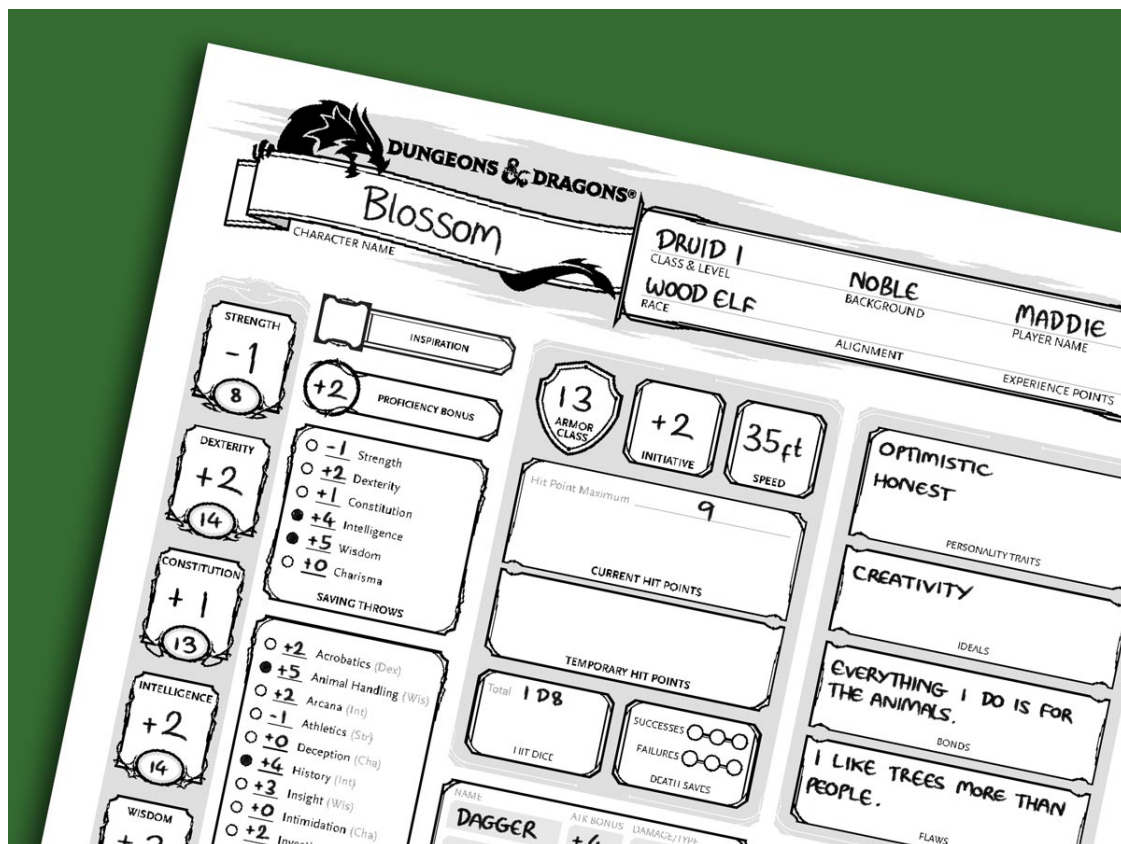


experience, and skills. Every character is following their own strengths, and there's no real limit on which path you can take," says Stefan.

"The kids can also see the consequences of each choice they make. They get to take ownership and responsibility, and then try again in a different way if they fail."

Stefan wanted to ensure the kids got the maximum benefit from their after-school gaming, employing some interesting tactics to deliver the best results.

"If a student was underperforming in math, I'd make them party treasurer to keep track of funds and supplies. They wouldn't even see it as math, they'd see it as a privilege and a chance to help the group. If kids were shy or lacking in confidence, I'd make them group leaders. And if kids needed help with reading comprehension, I'd put them in charge of looking up the rules," Stefan advises, noting that these D&D experiences soon helped to boost the kids' scores in class.



"You could definitely see improvements in test scores, especially in reading comprehension. The amount of foreshadowing and character cues that appear in the game really helped kids when it came to

analyzing text. With math, the improvements were more anecdotal, as D&D helped them cooperate in analyzing statistics. I saw them understanding math in a more applied way—not to solve an equation, but to make a decision about something.”

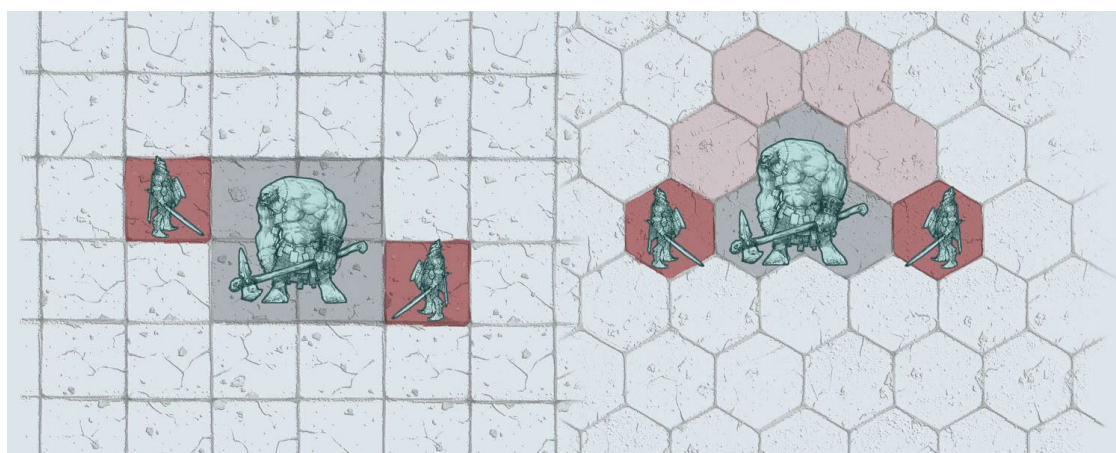
All of which is even more impressive when you consider that half the group of players was made up of kids receiving additional classroom support.

“I narrowed down the feats and abilities a little, but the kids picked up the gameplay mechanics so easily. After a while I let them come up with any feats that they felt were reasonable. The group would discuss what was appropriate for their characters’ level and how that might work in terms of the d20 rules system. It was great for their democratic teamwork skills.”

One boy even set about pushing his artificer skills to the max by inventing the first radio in the group’s fantasy universe.

“At that point he had doubts of graduating high school, let alone attending college. In the hour and a half that he stayed after school, and all as part of the game of Dungeons & Dragons, he spent three months studying electrical engineering to be able to invent the radio,” says Stefan, proudly aware that the boy is now on course to graduate.

“Playing as an avatar in the game gave him courage. He had a goal and he knew what it took to achieve it: time, discipline, a little bit of luck, and work. And no-one in that universe was telling him that he couldn’t do it.”



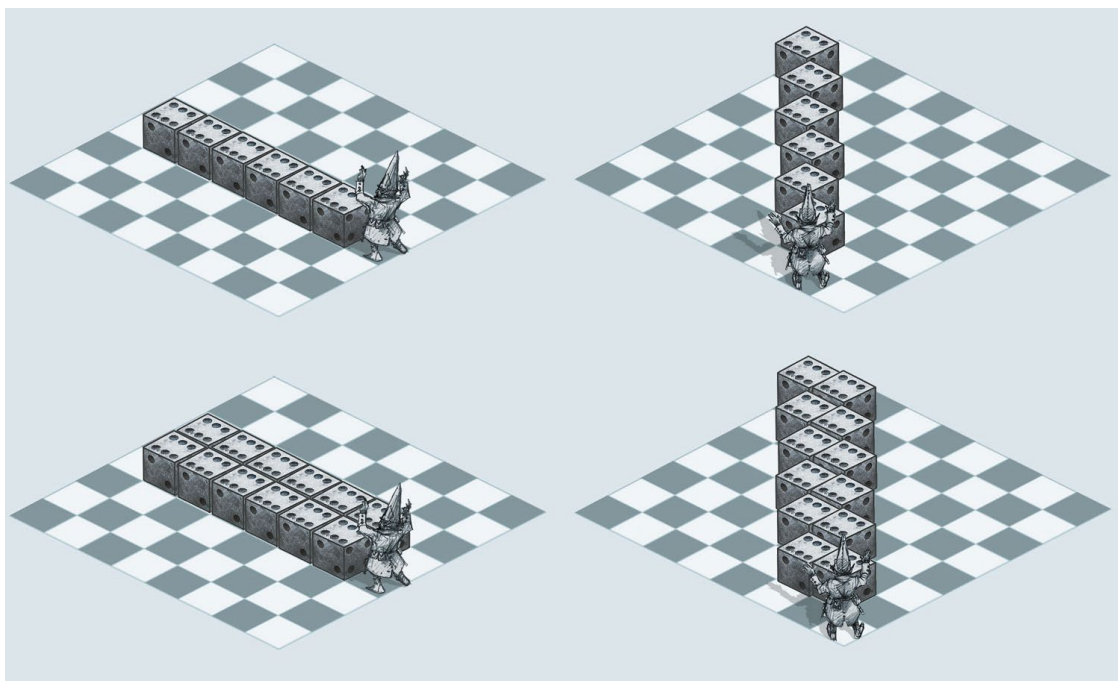
# BUSINESS SCHOOL, WITH

# GLADIATORS!

Having enjoyed the classic gameplay of plundering dungeons and squaring off against monsters for a few years, the kids realized that the rules system within D&D could be used as a simulator for, well... anything. One of Stefan's most memorable campaigns saw the kids, barely ten years old, develop a sophisticated business simulation built around gladiatorial entertainment.

"The characters arrived in a gang-run city of gamblers and ne'er do wells, where they decided to start a gladiator arena, the Brawl Hall, and run it as a business. The kids totally ran with this idea. They had a 15-page profit and loss sheet, sold concessions, offered tickets and coupons, ran a creative marketing team, and held executive roles. It transformed into a media company, which was franchised, then merged with another company, and there were job interviews and corporate meetings... all this, based on that d20 rules system!" Stefan relays, noting that D&D is also perfectly suited to teaching history.

"You could turn anything into a simulation and gamify it. It allows you to give a whole classroom of kids the same incentives that historical characters faced in real events. If the choices they make result in terrible, wide-ranging consequences, it not only engages them emotionally in history, it also makes them consider the consequences of choices that are being made today."





# START YOUR OWN CLUB

“There’s no better place to start playing D&D than with kids. I wholeheartedly recommend playing it with your own kids if you have them. And if you’re a teacher, there will always be kids who are interested in creating a club,” says Stefan, who’s published a **D&D Primer** on his blog to help new players, young and old.

He recently moved away from education to retrain as a game designer, and says he owes much of the inspiration for his new role to his D&D after-school club.

“DMing with the kids taught me that creating fun for others is often about letting go of my own ego, and creating systems, rules, and NPC interactions that make sense to everyone, so every player feels invested in the game.”





Clubs in need of ready-to-use materials should check out the [free introductory resources](#) the D&D Team provides to help get new campaigns up and running.

The D&D Team has also created digital club kits to support organizers in schools, libraries, community centers, or other places where gaming is used as an enrichment program. These are meant to serve as a replacement for the usual physical kits, keeping organizers connected with their communities at a time when players can't gather together. Head to the [Digital Club Support Program page](#) to apply for kits.

Maintaining safe social distancing doesn't mean clubs can't still come together. While it is not advisable to meet under current government guidelines, you can still gather your party before venturing forth without breaking out the ten-foot poles. For information on everything from rolling digital dice to ways to connect, check out [Dragon+'s advice](#).

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BACK TO TOP



## D&D Virtual Play Weekends

Chris Tulach discusses the latest way to play D&D online every month, whether you're on Discord, Fantasy Grounds, Roll20, or Zoom.

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### UPDATE: APRIL'S VIRTUAL PLAY WEEKEND!

April's D&D Virtual Play Weekend will be packed full of ancient threats in icy climes, non-English gaming opportunities, and more mysteries than you can shake a deerstalker at!

Following on from the two *Candlekeep Mysteries* adventures that previewed in March, a further four stories from Faerûn's most storied library will be added to the April event. All of those adventures will be in the tier one and tier two ranges (for 1st to 4th level, and 5th to 10th level characters), making them a great way for any player to get involved.

“Our *Candlekeep Mysteries* previews were wildly popular in March and we’re expanding on those stories. We’re offering at least six adventures from *Candlekeep Mysteries* in April, including the two that we ran previously,” says Chris Tulach, Product Manager for D&D Play. “The adventures taken from that book are all very different and are a lot of fun to play, so you can expect them to be a regular feature for Virtual Play Weekends for a while.”

Chris also suggests that playing the *Candlekeep Mysteries* adventures during April’s Virtual Play Weekends is a great way to get started in the Adventurers League Masters Campaign. The Candlekeep-based adventures have a loose tie-in to the *Dreams of the Red Wizards* storyline, which is the focus of the current Masters Campaign, so joining via them is the only way to enter that campaign with a 1st level character.

In March, Baldman Games also expanded its pool of Dungeon Masters from outside the United States to include a Portuguese speaking Discord server featuring largely Brazilian D&D fans, while also offering tickets to a couple of Spanish-speaking tables. Thanks to that continued increase in non-English speaking DMs and players, other countries and languages are joining that roll call.

“Pandemic or not, Dungeons & Dragons connects everybody in the world. Following on from the Portuguese-only Discord server we opened up in March, we’re opening a German-only server in April,” Chris says.

And as if that wasn’t enough, players involved with the Adventurers League seasonal campaign can also play a brand-new adventure in April. *Volatile Thoughts* (DDAL 10-08), which is part of the *Icwind Dale: Rime of the Frost Maiden, Plague of Ancients* storyline, debuts that weekend.

“There’ll be eight Adventurers League seasonal adventures in total to play across the weekend, so you could make a whole weekend of play with just the seasonal campaign and be able to catch up with that storyline completely,” Chris advises.

**The next D&D Virtual Play Weekend takes place on April 16-18, 2021. You can register and buy tickets at [The Yawning Portal](#), find more player and general event information at the [Baldman](#)**

**Games website**, and find **Dungeon Master information** **here**.

## MARCH'S VIRTUAL PLAY WEEKEND!

**A**s social distancing continues to impact our ability to get together in person, how we connect with one another has evolved. The success of online virtual play offerings at events such as *D&D Live* and *D&D Celebration* proves there is a desire for more opportunities to share our love for all things Dungeons & Dragons. One new resource offering further remote options is **D&D Virtual Play Weekends**. This program allows gamers worldwide to gather once a month as part of this “mini-convention” for D&D tabletop play.

“*D&D Live* has its roots in being a streaming show, where influencers from our community stream actual play games that connect with our fall storyline. The 2019 event, which highlighted *Baldur’s Gate: Descent into Avernus*, went beyond that streaming show to become an in-person convention with sets, vendor merchandise, and a fuller attendee experience,” explains Chris Tulach, Product Manager for D&D Play.

“When in-person events were necessarily cancelled or postponed in 2020, we decided to pivot to a fully virtual event for *D&D Live*. We only had around eight weeks to put that together but we were really ambitious with our plans. By the time we got to *D&D Celebration* and the launch of *Icwind Dale: Rime of the Frostmaiden*, we were ready to create a full-on event with its own online portal, interactive maps, all the usual cool streaming content, and a liveplay offering.

“I knew that we needed to keep this momentum going because people were excited to be gathering virtually with their friends to experience D&D again. And they were really happy that we were helping to make that happen. As far back as July 2020, I pitched a monthly play event, which eventually became D&D Virtual Play Weekends.”





## First Steps

The monthly program of D&D Virtual Play Weekends began in November, allowing friends from around the world to play new Adventurers League content for the first time from the comfort of their own homes. The [Yawning Portal website](#) was set up to handle registration and ticketing, with organization and table assignments available on [Baldman Games' Discord server](#).

Games at the events are typically either two or four hours' long depending on the booking—although time slots can be longer to account for the virtual play format or if games run over on time. All Dungeon Masters are vetted and approved by Baldman Games, with DMs compensated through the sale of tickets at their table.

“If you haven’t played D&D in a while or have never played at all, you can book a seat at a table that’s specifically designed to help you learn. These ‘Intro to Dungeons & Dragons’ games are discounted, so instead of paying \$8 for a two-hour game, you only pay \$4 to learn how to play D&D,” Chris explains.

“We currently have four main platforms that people are using to run games. If players have no familiarity with virtual tabletops, they use Zoom or Discord; otherwise, they’re using either [Roll20](#) or [Fantasy Grounds](#). Following our November event, we added games that teach players how to use those tools.”

While most games are played in English, D&D Virtual Play Weekends feature players from all over the world. And the Yawning Portal website already offers tickets to D&D games played in other languages, thanks to an increase in the number of DMs.

“Since we’ve been able to expand our pool of Dungeon Masters from outside the United States, we’ve expanded our reach. We have a really strong Brazilian contingent of gamers that love to play, and there are a couple of DMs who run games in Portuguese. We also have a couple of Spanish-speaking tables as well.”



## Beyond The Adventurers League

The storylines of the D&D Virtual Play Weekends have so far largely followed the seasonal campaigns, including *Icewind Dale: Rime of the Frostmaiden*, an alternative campaign set in Eberron, and a D&D masters’ campaign called *Dreams of the Red Wizards*. However, Dungeon Masters can now submit their own adventures from outside of the D&D Adventurers League.

“Our primary focus is on Adventurers League play, but we’re slowly allowing Dungeon Masters to run other D&D content and we’ll continue to expand that in the coming months,” Chris tells *Dragon+*.

“We’re also going to allow that content to be edition agnostic. If someone wants to run a first edition D&D game, they can run an adventure in first edition. As long as it’s Dungeons & Dragons

they’re playing, we don’t mind. We want players who are interested in those legacy editions to be able to join us, too.”

The Virtual Play Weekends are also looking to take a leaf out of *D&D Live* and *D&D Celebration*’s playbooks and host panel content. These would likely run once a quarter instead of being a monthly addition, with the first one taking place in March.

“Our panels will focus on giving DMs advice, possibly doing a deep dive into one aspect of Dungeon Mastering, with tips and tricks from content creators and influencers in the community,” he reveals.

“The first of these will be right around the release date of *Candlekeep Mysteries*, and while it won’t focus on the book itself it’ll be thematically linked to it in some way. We’ll bring some of the content creators who worked on the project to talk about the adventures and adapting them for your games at home.”



## Rolling Forward

“We’ve seen incredible growth in the first few months of this program. What’s so exciting is that it’s largely being driven by word of mouth. People are asking their friends to come and play with them, so we’re growing organically, which is the best way to expand. And when the people that are being brought in are being referred by other folks, they’re likely to stick around,” Chris says excitedly.

“We have just finalized our dates for D&D Virtual Play Weekends

for the whole year and we don't plan on deprecating the program once everyone is able to play in person once more. When we come out of the other side of this, we expect the way that people engage with their favorite games is going to change. We believe people are going to be more comfortable with a blended experience: playing in person, but also playing online sometimes for convenience.”



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# The Best of the Dungeon Masters Guild

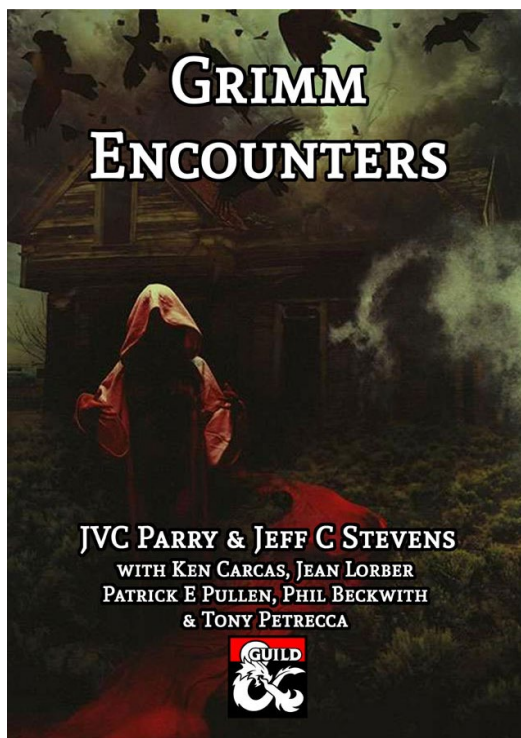
This issue we follow the muse and induct stories for the ages into the world of fifth edition Dungeons & Dragons.



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**W**here would we be without bards? Whether they're convincing us to **toss a coin to our Witcher**, capturing the true nature of **"brave" Sir Robin** or writing **the greatest literary works** the world has ever seen, the power of their stories is undeniable. As we look forward to the release of *Candlekeep Mysteries*, which plucks seventeen books from that famous library's shelves and presents them as adventures, it seemed the perfect opportunity to highlight bardic tales from our world that have been turned into playable fifth edition modules. Sit back and allow *Dragon+* to tell you a story...

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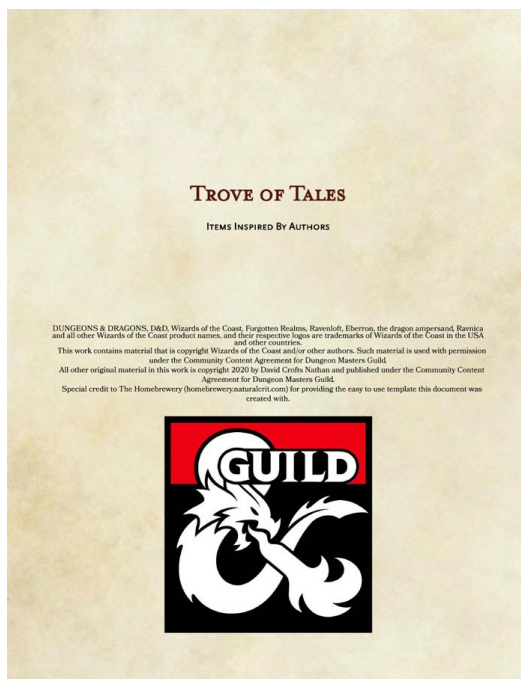
**Grimm Encounters, by J.V.C. Parry, Jeff C. Stevens, Ken Carcas, Jean Lorber, Patrick E. Pullen, Phil Beckwith, and Tony Petrecca**

Price: \$4.95 Suggested (PDF)

“As with many Grimm Tales, there are no real winners in this scenario,” says J.V.C. Parry’s text for *Trapped in Iron*, summing up these twelve horrifying encounters. Based on classic fairy tales from the Grimm Brothers and their contemporaries, they’re perfect for dropping into games set in Ravenloft or the Shadowfell.

New creatures such as the hood appear as stat blocks in an appendix at the end.

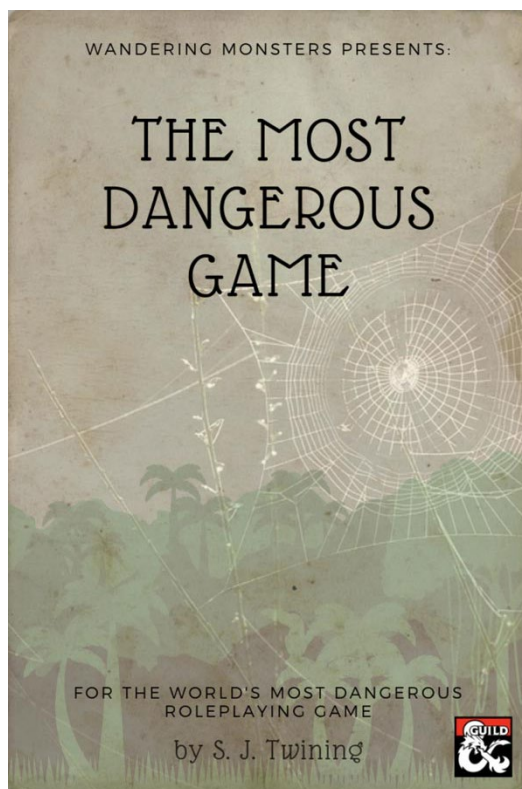
[LEARN MORE](#)



**Trove of Tales, by David Nathan**  
Price: PWYW (PDF)

This collection of fifth edition magic items draws brilliantly from the works of William Shakespeare, Edgar Allan Poe, children’s authors Roald Dahl and Dr. Seuss, and bestselling Japanese writer Haruki Murakami. We love the idea of a Shakespearean *talkative skull*, and would welcome the chance to use jester Yorick’s skill bonus in performance.

[LEARN MORE](#)



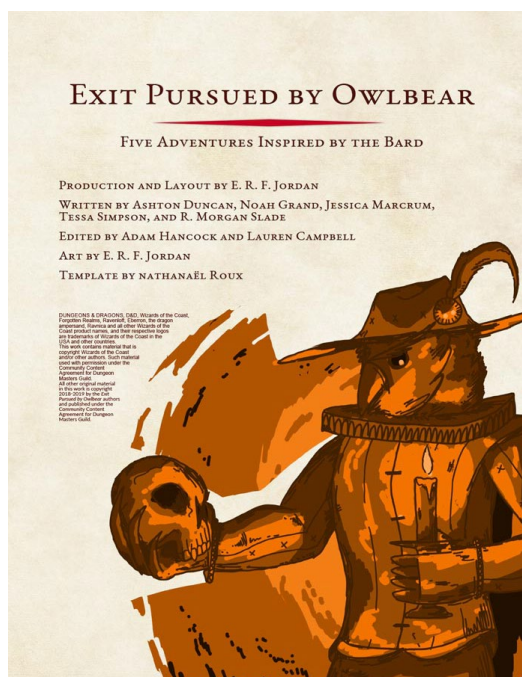
## The Most Dangerous Game, by S.J. Twining

Price: \$2.99 (PDF)

Richard Connell's literary classic has been warped into a survival adventure for 1st to 4th level characters. A catastrophic shipwreck maroons the party on an isolated jungle island. Bereft of even the simplest of weaponry they must survive challenging encounters in these perilous wilds, while fleeing a disgraced general who is the bloodthirsty master of the hunt. Twining cleverly adapts *Out of the Abyss*'s drow pursuit guidelines and includes ten pre-

generated characters (without equipment of course) for a quick start adventure.

[LEARN MORE](#)



## Exit Pursued by Owlbear, by E. R. F. Jordan, Ashton Duncan, Noah Grand, Jessica Marcrum, Tessa Simpson, R. Morgan Slade, Adam Hancock, Lauren Campbell

Price: \$14.95 (PDF)

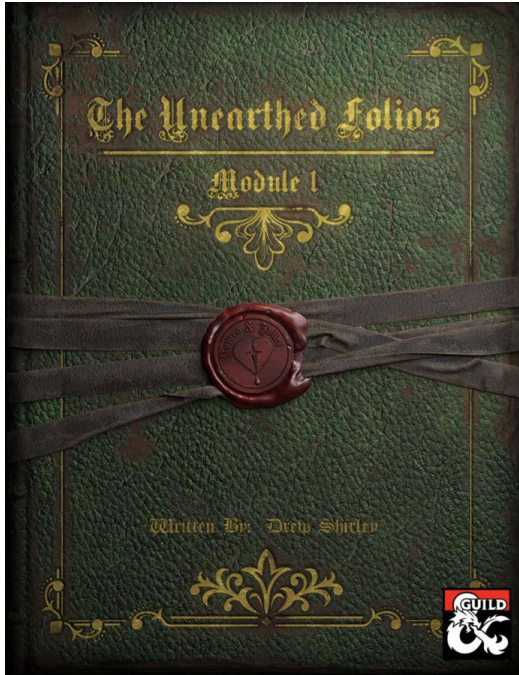
All the multiverse's a stage as this collection of playable modules bring William Shakespeare's most famous works to fifth edition. Introduced as "five old stories made new again", these adventures put a D&D spin on



*Hamlet, The Taming of the Shrew, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Much Ado About Nothing, and Macbeth* (with a d12 table of Shakespearean insults thrown in for good measure).

[LEARN MORE](#)

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### **Unearthed Folios Module 1, by Drew Shirley**

Price: \$4.99 (PDF)

Author Drew Shirley transports *Romeo & Juliet* to the mean streets of Waterdeep in this eight-hour adventure intended for mature readers. Two noble households are at war, with further escalation punishable by death, and the party must pick a side. As the opening note to DMs says, “We like this adventure best when it bounces between comedy and stark drama, but there is no set way the module

should feel or be played. Your story is a glass castle. Your job is to hand your players a bat and enjoy the mess.”

[LEARN MORE](#)

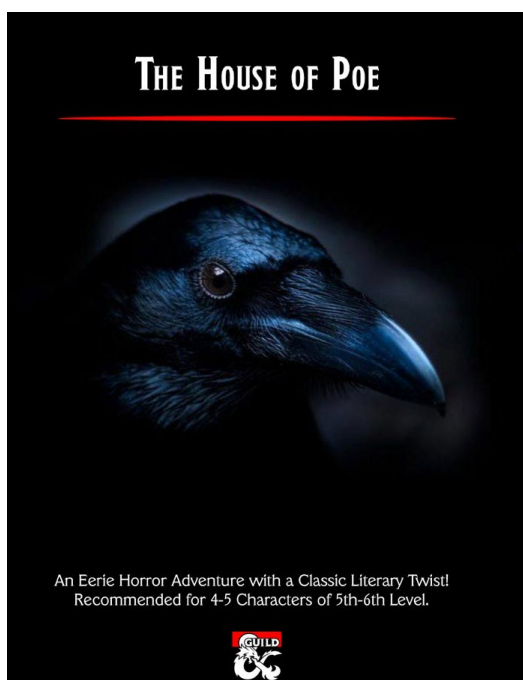
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### **The House of Poe, by Dan Houbrick**

Price: \$5.00 (PDF)

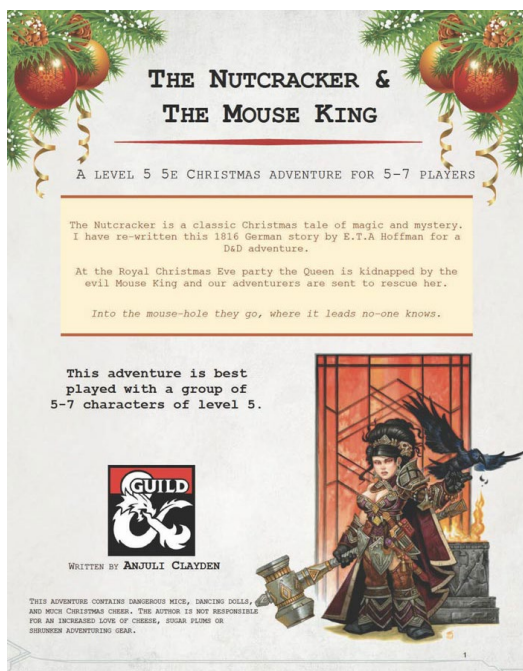
This creepy horror adventure for 5th to 6th-level characters is filled with hidden references and homages to the works of Edgar Allan Poe (*The Fall of the House of Usher, The Black Cat, The*





*Raven, A Descent into the Maelstrom, Eleonora, The Island of the Fay, The Tell-Tale Heart, and more!)*, with the author himself filling a major role.

[LEARN MORE](#)



**The Nutcracker, a retelling, by Anjuli Smith**  
Price: \$7.04 (PDF)

This classic tale, written by German romantic author E.T.A. Hoffmann in 1816, has been reimaged as a 5th level adventure for five to seven players. Can you save the Queen from the evil Mouse King, venturing into his mousehole to face magic, mystery, and sugar plums? Useful additions include 3D isometric maps and pregenerated character sheets for a

monk, rogue, bard, wizard, fighter, warlock, and cleric.

[LEARN MORE](#)

## Q&A: JIMMY MERITT

One of *Dragon+*'s favorite film tropes is the heist. The ratio of butt to chair should be as small as possible when watching a heist thriller, as you perch on the edge of your seat—and playing out similar scenarios in the living, breathing world of Dungeons & Dragons should deliver the same experience. DMs Guild author Jimmy Meritt has the jewels you want to snatch when it comes to fifth edition heist shenanigans, and he explains how to drop the perfect caper into your campaigns.



Jimmy Meritt

**We might know the answer to this already, but are you a DM?**  
I am a Dungeon Master.

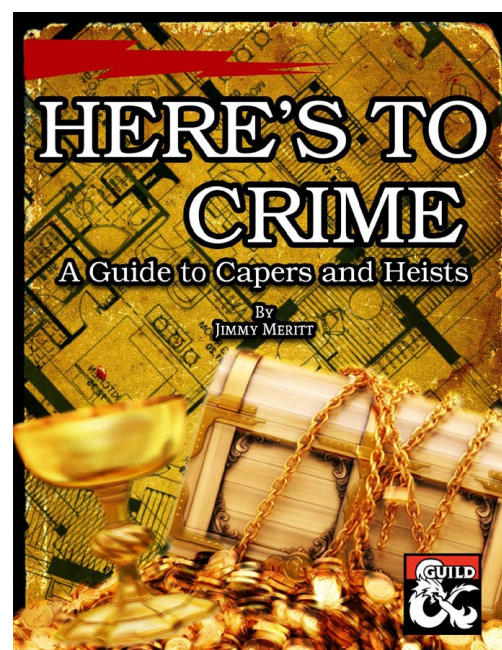
**We had a feeling, because many of the concepts you've created would work as content a DM could instantly drop into an adventure. Is that how you came to write this kind of material?**

A lot of what I'm writing is content a DM needs. What can help them run this particular adventure? What's a fun thing to drop in?

**You also wrote *Here's to Crime: A Guide to Capers and Heists*. Is**

**that a manual for DMs who want to add those antics into their games?**

It assembles some of my house rules. I'm super into heist films and I think it's fun when a game can capture the feel of a movie. This ruleset creates a space for the players to start their own mischief and then get themselves out of trouble. It's essentially teaching my DM style, because a lot of the book explains how you can give



the players control over the narrative to really let them run loose.

### **How do you embed that DM style into your content?**

Anyone reading the content I'm putting out should get an idea of what playing at my table is like and my personality and DM style hopefully come across. I encourage DMs to give the players the spaces they need to create a lot of chaos. I believe that having a lot of freedom is a key part of the appeal of D&D for the players. If they're sitting at the table and they can tell that the DM's not going to let them get away with a lot, it can feel as if they're just going through the motions. As a DM, you can feel the players start to deflate when that happens.

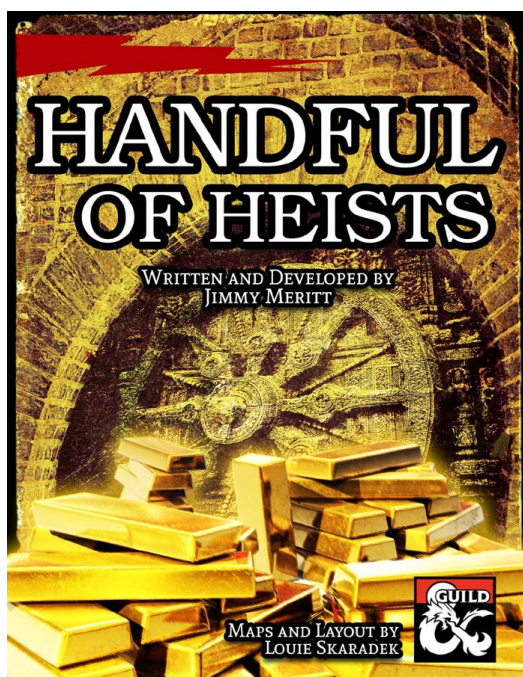
But when a player feels the DM is going to let their creative ideas flow, that pushes their creativity even further. I try to include spots in the storyline where they can basically do whatever they want and it won't throw off the adventure. For example, in a heist there might be a spot where they need to create a distraction. Whatever action they want to do at that point has a chance of working, so the players can be allowed to take control.

### **Players often remember those in-game moments when they get to run free most fondly...**

We've all had that moment where you're watching a movie and you think, 'Why is the hero doing that? Why didn't they do this instead?' Part of the fun of D&D is realizing you get to do the thing you always wished the heroes in the movies would do.



What kind of content will DMs find in *Handful of Heists*? Is it everything from a classic jewel caper to emptying bank vaults?



There are five short adventures that are all based around Waterdeep and I've tried to include a good variety. Whenever I could, I used a canonical location because I like the idea of using areas of Waterdeep that we've all read about in books and seen in video games. One is set in the Yawning Portal and is about the players working a social con to try and get their hands on a treasure.

On top of that, I wrote a tower heist for Ahghairon's Tower, which is a key location within

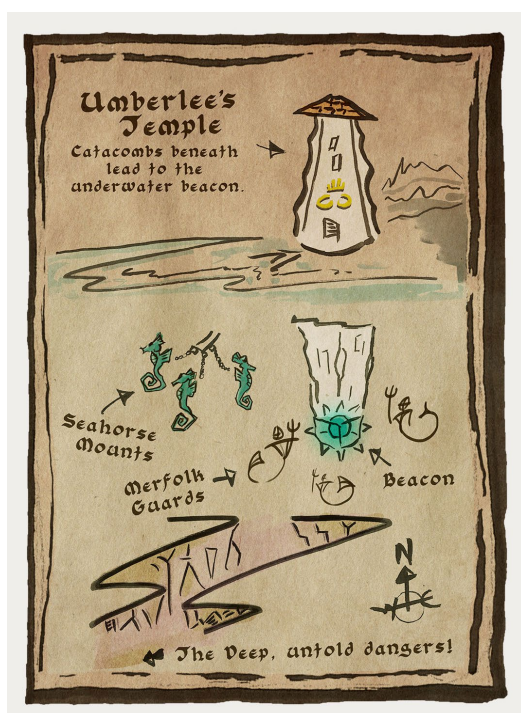
Waterdeep. That's the most elaborate heist—the characters must run through, try to grab something, and make it out. I've also created an underwater dungeon crawl, because there aren't many of those in existence. And I've set one in the Xanathar's vault, which is a more classic situation where the players need to find the combination for the security system.

I've also included a farce-style adventure that is inspired by the British comedy TV series *Fawlty Towers*. One of the first events in the *Dragon Heist* campaign sees the players take ownership of a bar, and they have a rivalry with another bar owner. As I was reading that, I thought, 'Players are really going to want to do something to sock this guy.' This encounter sees them mess with the rival bar on its big opening night, and then have to protect their own bar as the other owner tries to mess up their big opening night.

**What's your top tip for a DM running a heist?**

The more confident the players are that you'll let them get away with things, the less time they'll spend planning and then the action can start. We've all had those heist





Umberlee map by Louie Skaradek (Select to view)

adventures where we reach hour five and the players are still figuring out how they're going to open a window. And that all comes from the players believing that the DM is trying to catch them. If they feel comfortable that the only trouble they'll get in is the trouble they cause, you'll save lots and lots of time. Let's go do it. Let's get in there!

**You seem to excel at creating side quest content that's easy to drop into games, as also seen with the monster hunts...**

I love working with **Vall Syrene** and I'm super happy that I've got to create a bunch of monster hunts with him. If your campaign is a TV show, these are the monster-of-the-week episodes. You'll sit down, you'll play for two and a half hours, there'll be a creature, there'll be a plot twist. When you win, everyone feels like they had a very satisfying session. They're *Witcher*-style adventures and you could easily put this content on a town's bulletin board.

**Is there a lot of crossover between heists and monster hunts? Is it fair to describe them both as experiences where something unexpected happening amps up the drama?**

Pretty much. When you run a short adventure that contains an entire story it's easier to find the special element that will make the players remember that individual session. What's the twist that



Theros Beholder by Vall Syrene

makes it different from any other average heist? Or separates it from any average quest to go and fight a monster?

**Some of your adventures have also been converted for use on Fantasy Grounds. Has using that digital platform led to any changes?**

Having the material on Fantasy Grounds is especially helpful now that so many games have gone remote. Artist Louie Skaradek and myself spent a lot of time on our newest adventure talking about what we could do with the art and the maps that make it easier for people playing online. One of our maps had all these secret passages on it, and if it was on a tabletop a DM might cover those up with cardboard—but you can't do that if it's online. We made three different versions of that map and people have appreciated that.

**What have you got coming up in the future?**

My main entry points to the Forgotten Realms were the '90s computer games. *Baldur's Gate II* had a really big influence on me and I'm having fun writing heists and capers set in that city. **One of those is available already** and I have a few more projects based in Baldur's Gate on the way.

I'm then sorely tempted to write a *Neverwinter Nights*-style adventure, because that's another computer game that had a big impact on me. I'd love to create heists or a city adventure set in Neverwinter.

**You can find more of Jimmy Merritt's fifth edition content on the DMs Guild by visiting [his author page](#) and connect with him on [Twitter](#).**

## DOWNLOAD BALDUR'S GATE: LARCENY AT THE HALL OF WONDERS FOR FREE!

Attention scoundrels! Pull a daring heist in one of Faerûn's most iconic cities in this one-shot for 3rd level characters. The Hall of Wonders in Baldur's Gate already showcases incredible inventions but rumors persist of a treasure-filled vault hidden beneath this great hall, guarded by traps and clockwork monsters. This module includes ten pieces of original art (including a blueprint-style player handout version of the map to help plan the heist), new creature variants, three new items (including a *complimentary toaster*), and plot hooks to continue the campaign beyond this caper.

*Dragon+* is offering you the chance to download the PDF version of *Baldur's Gate: Larceny at the Hall of Wonders*, by clicking the link below. It will remain free for the life of this issue. Enjoy!

[DOWNLOAD THE FREE PDF](#)

### GET IT FREE FOR USE ON FANTASY GROUNDS

Modules are not loaded automatically on Fantasy Grounds. To install a new module, place the .mod file into the modules subfolder of the FG data folder on your PC. Modules can then be activated for a given campaign through the Library window (or the Module Activation window) of the Fantasy Grounds software.

[DOWNLOAD THE FREE MODULE](#)

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## FIRESIDE WITH PETER ADKISON

Wizards of the Coast founder and CEO of Gen Con Peter Adkison is known for his fireside chats with the early creators of Dungeons &

Dragons and *Magic: The Gathering*. In the newest season of *Fireside with Peter Adkison*, presented by the Dungeon Masters Guild, he talks to the pivotal writers, editors, and designers creating a new wave of D&D.

Peter recently interviewed Iranian American writer Justice Arman, who manages a surgical clinic by day. In addition to penning best-selling DMs Guild supplements (such as *Devil's Advocate: A Guide to Infernal Contracts*), Justice is also a goblin—real title!—at Beadle & Grimm's Pandemonium Warehouse, where he works on incredible boxed sets such as *Curse of Strahd: Legendary Edition*.



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## DESIGN THOUGHT: HOMAGE NOT FROMAGE

As we've seen with the DMs Guild content highlighted above, popular culture such as literature can provide inspiration for everything from small encounters to full adventures. When writing your own homage to an existing work, even the smallest idea in a work of fiction can inspire an epic experience.

For example, if there are spaceships in D&D (see *Expedition to the Barrier Peaks*), are there deadly xenomorphs with acid for blood? If the vehicle in Jules Verne's *The Time Machine* can visit any era, might it set down in a period when magic still existed? And what if that prison break the party stages leads to the discovery of a mysterious man in an iron mask in a cell nearby?



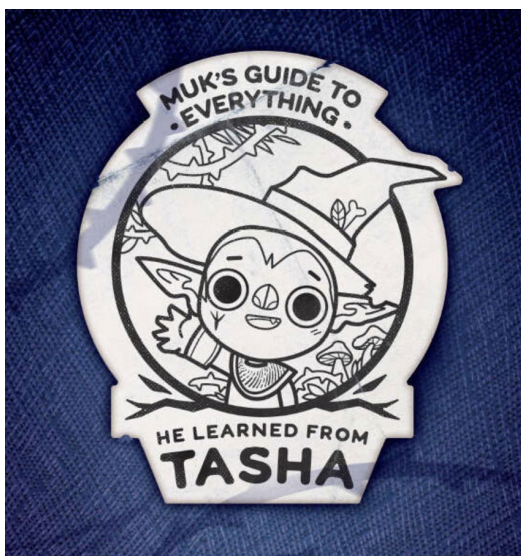
Whichever element you choose to emulate in your fifth edition world, it makes sense to not be too rigid and to use the premise of an existing work as a jumping off point. Mimicking an environment or storyline and creating a general sandbox feel for your players to explore makes for an enjoyable experience. Trying to force them into a scene-by-scene remake of your favorite book, film, TV series or video game, less so.

It might also be wise not to reveal that they're about to step foot onto some hallowed cinematic or literary ground. If you tip the players off, they might be tempted to use their out-of-game knowledge to shortcut the situation. If the realization that they're in a storyline inspired by a popular work of fiction is allowed to occur naturally, their enjoyment will be increased even further.

And if you're thinking it might be difficult to transport an iconic character into Dungeons & Dragons, think again! We highly recommend checking out [Tulok the Barbarian's YouTube channel](#) (as [featured in Dragon+ #33](#)) for epic builds of some of your favorite fictional characters, which should also provide inspiration to help you create characters Tulok hasn't got around to mapping out yet.

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## SUPPORT EXTRA LIFE!



Join Muk and his friend Birdsquirrel for their newest adventure in Dankwood, as our crafty goblin teams up with the archmage Tasha to bring you more fun activities and adventure ideas.

This activity book, for players of all levels, has been lovingly crafted and illustrated by [Dragon+ #35 cover star, Emi Tanji](#). It includes puzzles, enjoyable adventure hooks written

by Adam Lee, and unique Dankwood critters developed by Chris Lindsay. Each page is also made to be colored and enjoyed, so let the adventure begin!

Best of all, the monies that Wizards of the Coast receive from sales of this PDF are donated to Extra Life in support of its local Children's Miracle Network Hospitals. Your purchase of this adventure goes to a truly great cause!

[Buy Muk's Guide to Everything He Learned From Tasha](#)



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## Win an Epic D&D Adventure!

Enter for a chance to live out your medieval fantasy at Warwick Castle courtesy of Comic Relief.

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**T**here are plenty of ways to take your Dungeons & Dragons experience to the next level: Whether you're upgrading your dice, building lavish sets for your miniatures or cosplaying your characters. But there are few Dungeons & Dragons experiences as epic as the two-day extravaganza that will take place at Warwick Castle in the UK.

Comic Relief is offering a two-day D&D experience for you and four friends in the Great Hall of Warwick Castle, with accommodation in a Knight's Village Woodland Lodge. Players will embark upon a brand-new D&D adventure led by professional DM Mark Hulmes (*High Rollers*, *Nights of Eveningstar*), while also having the opportunity to learn archery, jousting and falconry.

Day one boasts an epic D&D adventure in the Great Hall, a 'nose to beak' falconry experience (handling and flying birds of prey), and a night-time buffet including wine, beer, and soft drinks. The winners also receive a VIP Dungeon Pass, giving them access to the 50-

minute walk-through experience of the castle's dungeon that should only be attempted by the bravest of people!

As if that weren't enough, on day two, Karl Ude-Martinez, Company Director of **Knights of Middle England**, will host a series of impossibly fearsome quests. You'll learn sword fighting, archery, and jousting, with a chance to compete in a Run the Gauntlet challenge. This adventure concludes with one winner receiving an extraordinary, bespoke medieval sword, hand-made by Mark Taylor, Master Armorer at **Dressed to Kill**.

The whole experience is topped off with a personalized coat of arms and a goodie bag stuffed with Dungeons & Dragons merchandise.

"Remember that by entering this competition you're not just going to get the chance to play Dungeons & Dragons and visit a castle, you're also going to be helping people around the UK and across the world," Mark Hulmes says.

### **ENTER THE DRAW**

**This prize draw closes on April 4, 2021. All participants must be a UK resident over the age of 18. The winner is responsible for all arrangements and costs required to access the prize. Prize includes a VIP day-time food pass, accommodation, and free parking. The prize will take place after the UK government issues COVID-19 guidance confirming it is safe to do so. There is no obligation to make a donation in order to enter the draw. Full competition terms and conditions can be found **here**.**

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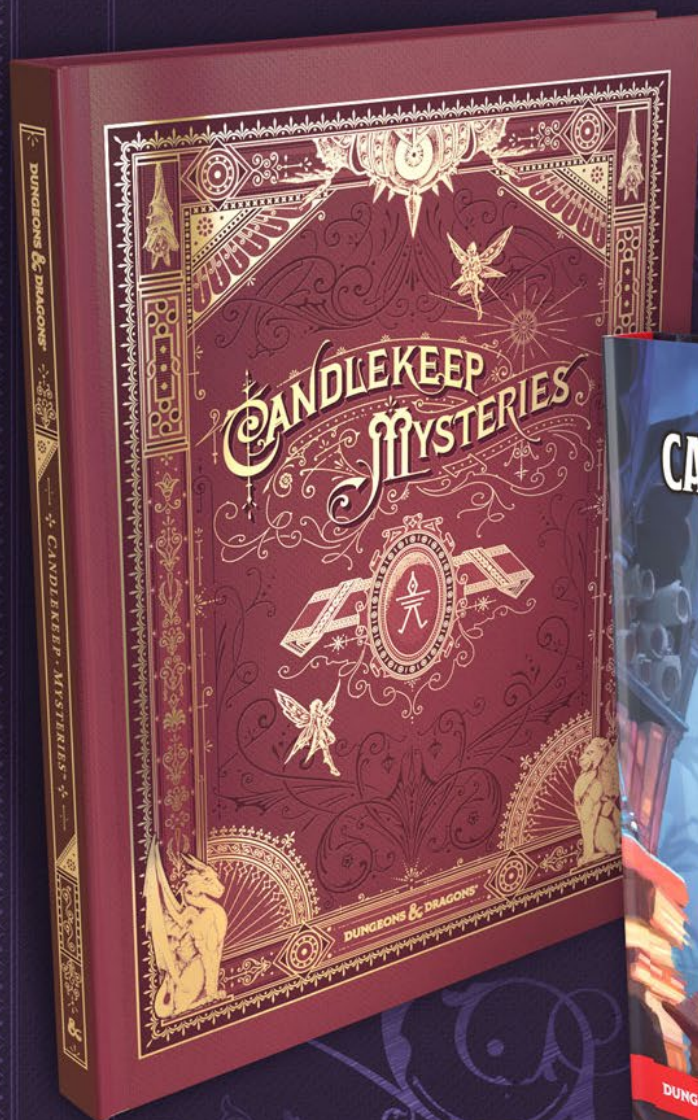
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# GREAT BOOKS

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## HIDE THEIR SECRETS WELL



RELEASE DATE

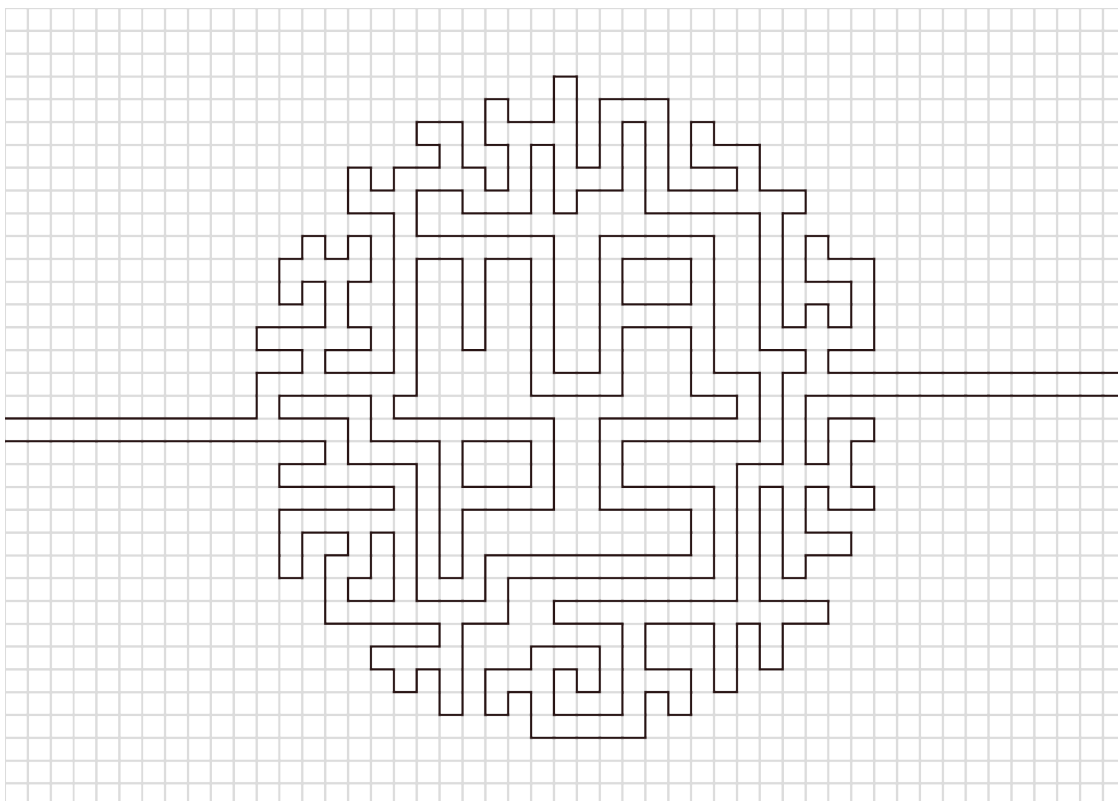
*March 16, 2021*



LEARN MORE AT [DND.WIZARDS.COM](https://dnd.wizards.com)

# Maps of the Month: Icewind Dale, Dragon Heist, and Ghosts of Saltmarsh

Beyond Candlekeep, more maps for the libraries in your game!



*WARNING: THESE MAPS MAY CONTAIN SPOILERS FOR  
ICEWIND DALE: RIME OF THE FROSTMAIDEN,  
WATERDEEP: DRAGON HEIST, AND GHOSTS OF  
SALTMARSH.*

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**I**n *Candlekeep Mysteries*, the books themselves serve as doorways to adventure. However, there are a number of reasons players may need to seek out libraries in your game—whether to research information on the enemies they’ll face, find maps to seek out the



locations they'll explore, or uncover clues to help them complete spells, potions, or other magical concoctions.

Or, you know, maybe just to read.

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## ICEWIND DALE

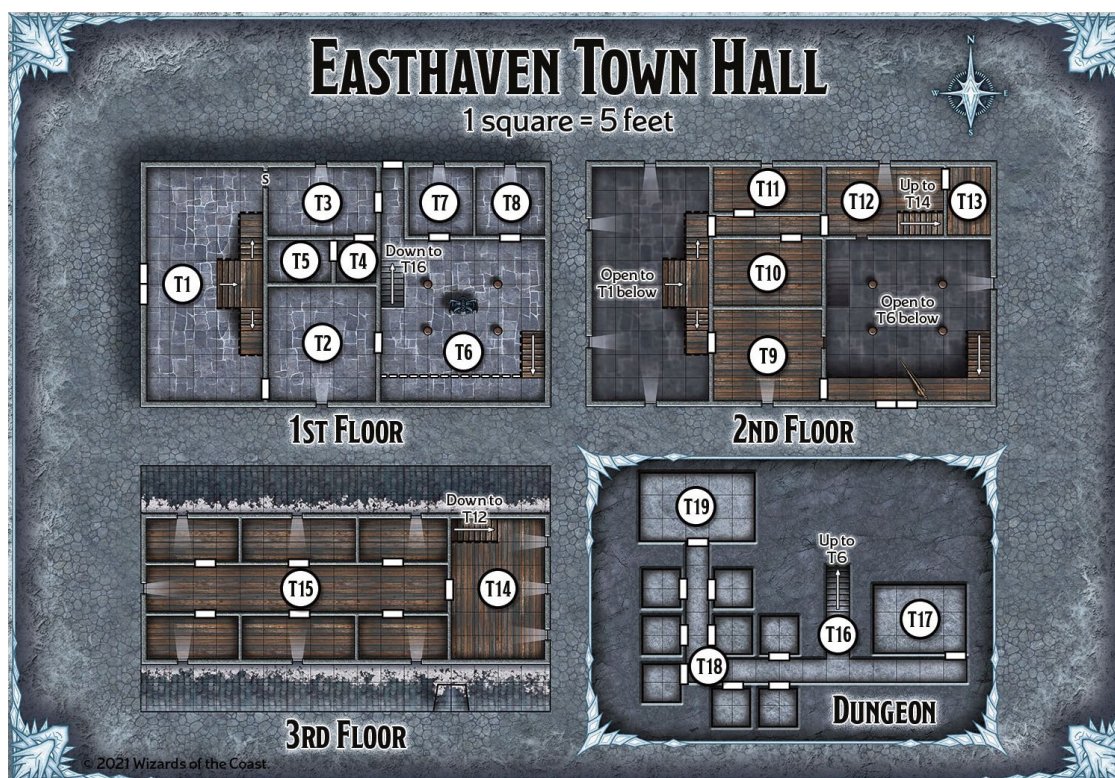
We've already visited several of the haunted and wintry locations from our most recent campaign sourcebook, *Icewind Dale: Rime of the Frostmaiden*. Let's turn to more stately locales as better befit the housing of books!

### Easthaven Town Hall

According to town lore, Easthaven's founders were thieves from a peninsula far to the south who refused to kowtow to a powerful thieves' guild and were driven out. To this day, Easthaven honors its shady founders by declaring pickpocketing legal within the town limits—which explains the “Watch thy pouch!” signs posted in various local establishments.

That said, the Town Hall seems a more orderly destination in Easthaven: a two-story, wattle-and-daub building where townsfolk gather to discuss important issues and come to renew licenses, pay fines, settle petty claims, and file complaints.

It might also be repurposed as a library for your games, where its above-ground levels have wooden floors, with framed oil paintings by local artists mounted above the wainscoting. It's an ideal location to browse the shelves and search out much needed information. Reserved books might even be held in the lower, dungeon level—hewn out of solid rock, with sturdy iron doors throughout.



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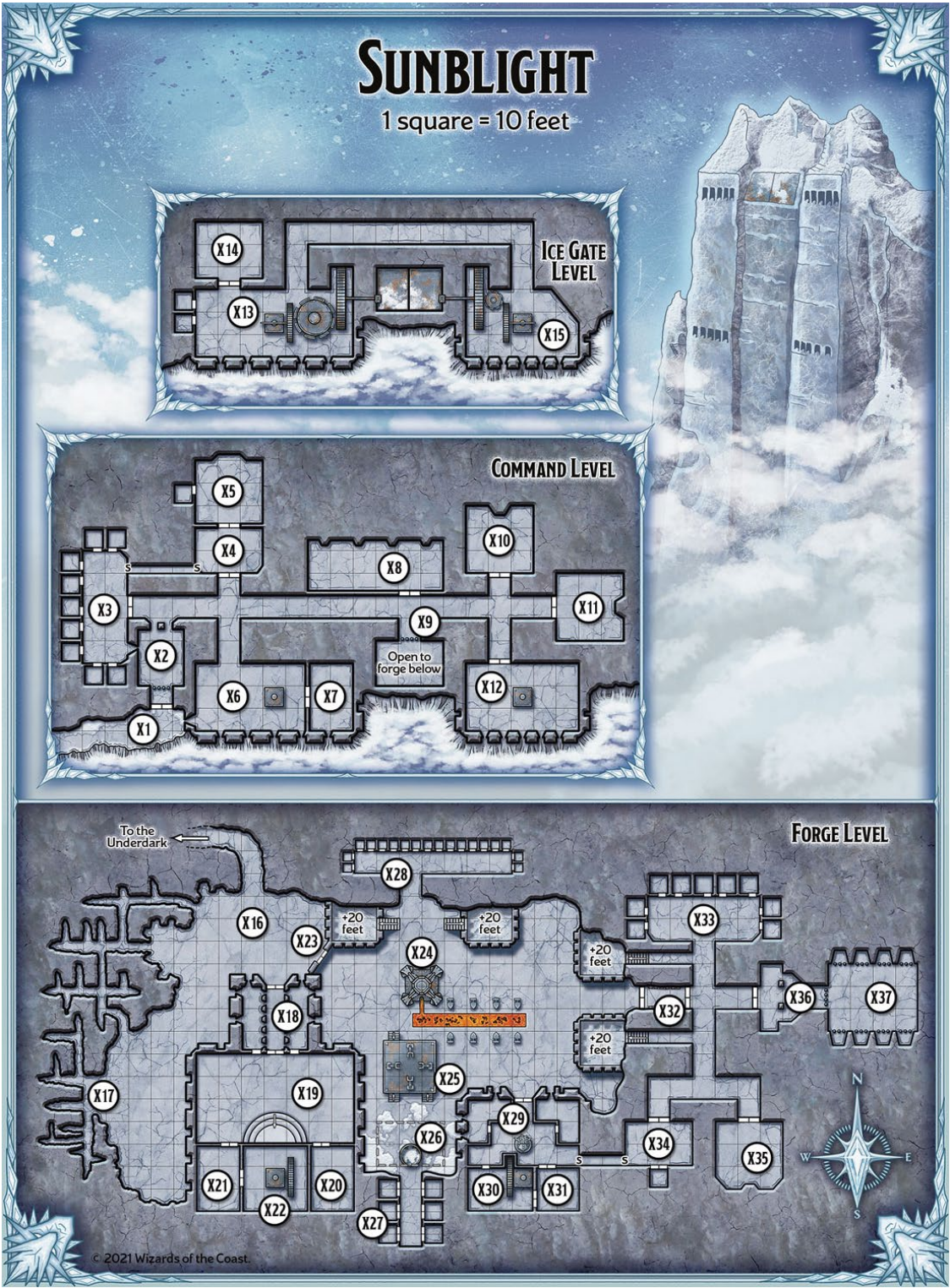
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## Sunblight

To access the rugged mountain fortress of Sunblight, characters must traverse the Spine of the World. And even if converted for other uses in your own campaigns, it still serves as a well-defended repository of many sorts.

Instead of a fortress guarded by duergar, Sunblight could be used as a fortified monastery. Its gate level provides access within, and its command level might serve as living quarters (complete with individual cells in area X3). As for its forge level? Perhaps this monastery holds important works and schematics for the manufacture of golems (and for a suitably grim, monastic-style forge, watch [David Fincher's \*Aliens 3\*](#) for reference).





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***Icewind Dale: Rime of the Frostmaiden*** is available now with an

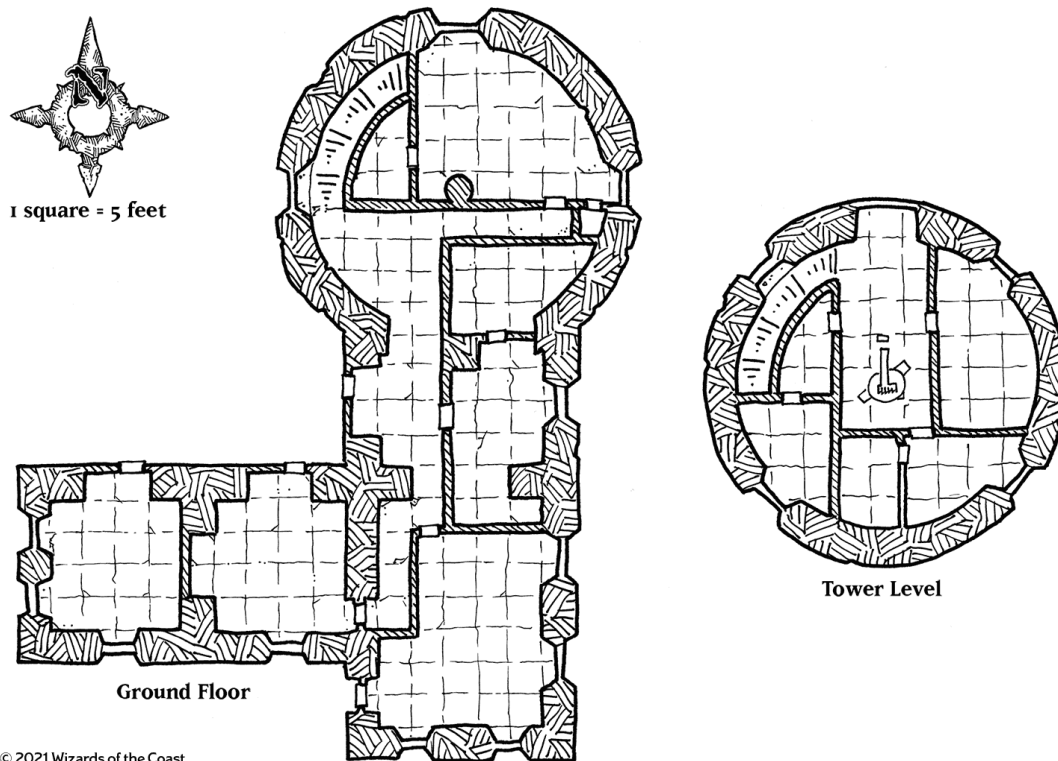
**MSRP of \$49.95. Order a physical copy at your **local game store**, bookstores such as **Barnes & Noble**, or online at retailers such as **Amazon**. Also available as a digital version at **D&D Beyond**, **Fantasy Grounds**, and **Roll20**.**

---

## WATERDEEP: DRAGON HEIST

A location such as Waterdeep naturally has plenty of existing libraries and other easily convertible buildings. We've included a few such maps from 2018's campaign storyline, *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist*, to use in your games:

### Converted Windmill



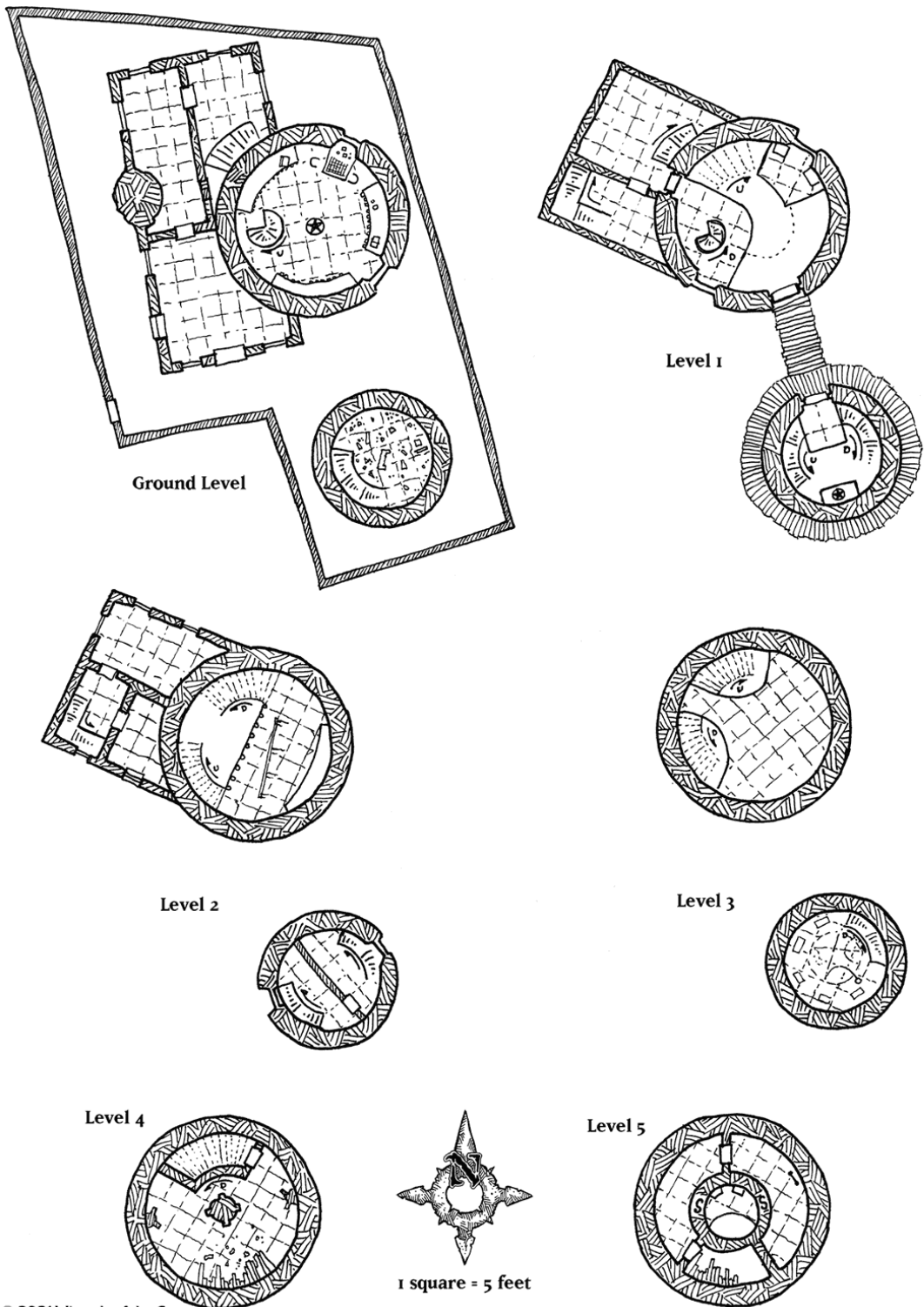
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### Kolat Towers





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***Waterdeep: Dragon Heist*** is available with an MSRP of \$49.95.

Order at your **local game store**, book stores such as **Barnes & Noble**, or online at retailers such as **Amazon**. You can also find *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* available via **Fantasy Grounds**, **Steam**, **Roll20**, and at **D&D Beyond**.

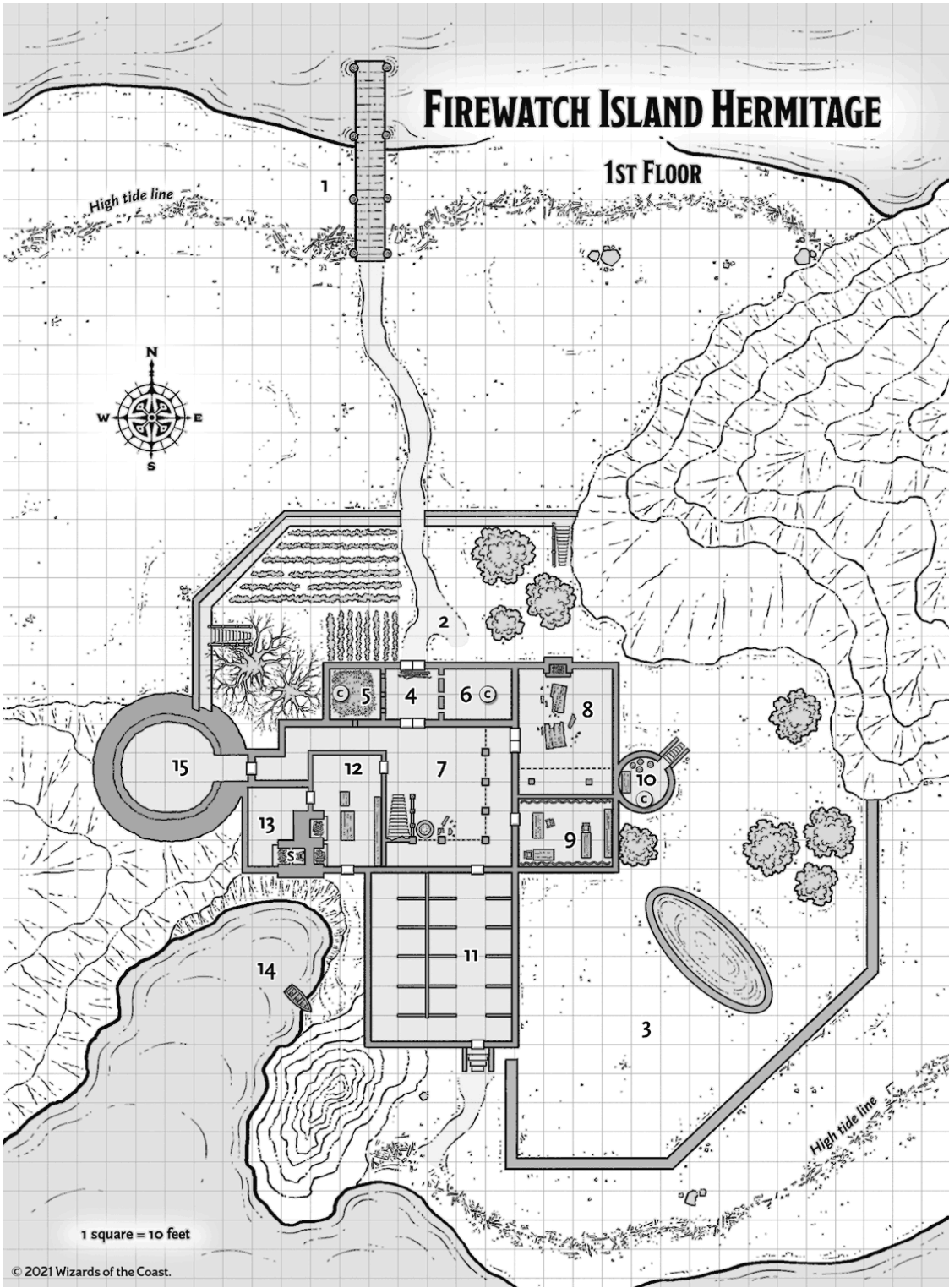
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## GHOSTS OF SALTMARSH

Considering the anthology nature of *Candlekeep Mysteries*, we also reached back to a previous anthology collection, *Ghosts of Saltmarsh*. Hey, what else is there to do at a seaside hermitage than curl up with a good book and watch the tide come in?

### Firewatch Island Hermitage (1st Floor)



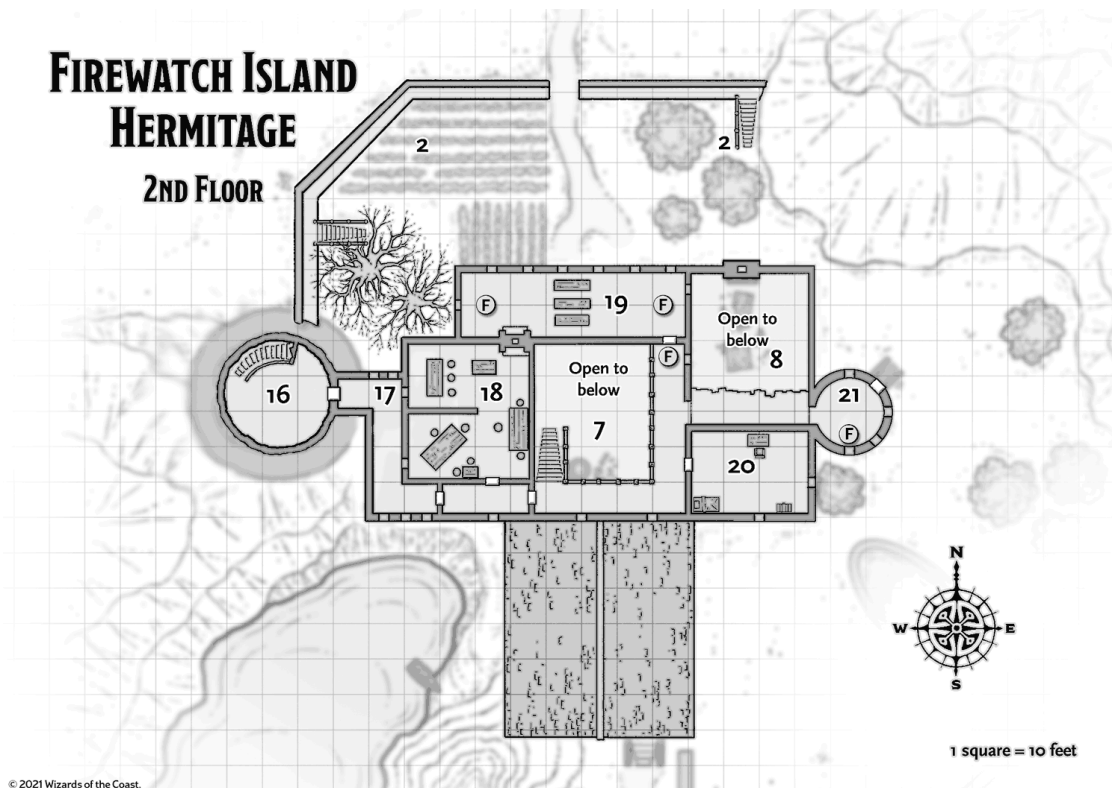


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**Firewatch Island Hermitage (2nd Floor)**



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***Ghosts of Saltmarsh*** is available now with an MSRP of \$49.95. Order now at your **local game store**, book stores such as **Barnes & Noble**, **D&D Beyond**, **Roll20**, **Fantasy Grounds**, **Steam**, or online at retailers such as **Amazon**.

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## CARTOGRAPHERS

As always, our appreciation goes out to our amazing cartographers, which this issue include Stacey Allan, Will Doyle, Dyson Logos, and Mike Schley.

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# Unearthed Arcana: Gothic Lineages

Transform into a creature of the night with options to become a dhampir, a hexblood, or a reborn.

By F. Wesley Schneider, Ben Petrisor, and Jeremy Crawford, with input from the rest of the D&D design team



## Playtest Material

The material here is presented for playtesting and to spark your imagination. These game mechanics are in draft form, usable in your campaign but not refined by final game development and editing. They aren't officially part of the game and aren't permitted in D&D Adventurers League events.

If we decide to make this material official, it will be refined based on your feedback, and then it will appear in a D&D book.



Three new race options have been added to *Unearthed Arcana*, bringing a gothic touch to player characters in Dungeons & Dragons. They include:

- The vampiric dhampir.
- The hag-like hexblood.
- The repurposed reborn.

These special options are unusual because they can be chosen during character creation or applied at an appropriate time later in a campaign, transforming your character. If you choose one of these lineages having previously been a member of another race, that lineage's racial traits can replace your ability score increases, languages, and even creature type.



(Select to view)

## Dhampir

Poised between the worlds of the living and the dead, dhampirs retain their grip on life yet are endlessly tested by vicious hungers. Dhampirs often arise from encounters with vampires, though another macabre or necromantic influence may also be the cause, with a roll on the Dhampir Origins table (see PDF) suggesting a character's



lineage. And while many dhampirs thirst for blood, there are other ways to gain sustenance from the living, as determined by a roll on the Dhampir Hungers table (also listed on the PDF).

A dhampir's ties to the undead grant it powers in the form of increased speed, darkvision, and a life-draining vampiric bite as a natural weapon. With unique insights into the nature of the undead, many dhampirs become adventurers and monster hunters. Some seek out danger, others pursue revenge against whatever cursed them, while still others embrace the solitude of the hunt.



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## Hexblood

Hexbloods are individuals infused with eldritch magic, fey energy, or mysterious witchcraft—many of whom enter into bargains with hags to gain their deepest wishes, only to find themselves eventually transformed. These physical changes often reflect the hag's influence and include an irremovable, living crown.

While many hexbloods gain their lineage after making a deal with a hag, others may reveal their nature as they age—particularly if a hag influenced them early in life or even before their birth. The Hexblood Origins table (see PDF) can determine how your character gained their lineage.

Hexbloods manifest hag-like traits, including long life, darkvision, and magical methods to beguile the senses and avoid the same. Their fey resilience protects them, while their hex magic allows them to cast the *disguise self* and *hex* spells.

They can also harmlessly pull out a nail, a tooth, or a lock of hair and have it function as a magic token. This allows hexbloods to send telepathic messages to the creature carrying the token, and enter a trance to see and hear from the token's location when within ten miles of it.



(Select to view)

## Reborn

Death isn't always the end and the reborn exemplify this. Some reborn exhibit the scars or injuries sustained during their deaths, while others are marvels of magic or science (their fate can be determined by rolling on the Reborn Origins table; see PDF). Whatever their history, reborn know a new life and seek experiences and answers all their own.

Occasionally, moments of peace, stress, or excitement might cause sensations or visions of the life that came before to come rushing back. The exact nature of such a dreamlike glimpse might be inspired by a roll on the Lost Memories table (also listed on the PDF). Flashes

from their past life also allow a reborn to add a d6 to ability checks a few times a day.

UNEARTHED ARCANA 2021  
Gothic Lineages

By F. Wesley Schneider, Ben Petrisor, and Jeremy Crawford, with input from the rest of the D&D design team

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The best way for you to give us feedback is in the survey we'll release on the D&D website soon. If we decide to make this material official, it will be refined based on your feedback, and then it will appear in a D&D book.  
The character options you read here might be more or less powerful than options in the *Player's Handbook*. If a design survives playtesting, we adjust its power to the desirable level before official publication. This means an option could be more or less powerful in its final form.  
This document features three new race options to playtest for player characters in D&D:  
• Dhampir  
• Headblood  
• Reborn

These options are special: you can choose one at character creation or at an appropriate time later in a campaign, transforming your character.

Creating Your Character

At 1st level, you choose whether your character is a member of the human race or of one of the game's fantastical races. Alternatively, you can choose one of the following lineages, if you choose a lineage, you might have once been a member of another race, but you aren't any longer. You now possess only your lineage's racial traits.  
When you create a character using a lineage option here, follow these additional rules during character creation.

**Ability Score Increases**  
When you determine your ability scores, increase one of those scores by 2, and increase a different one by 1. These increases can't raise a score above 20. You follow this rule regardless of the method you use to determine the scores, such as rolling or point buy. If you are replacing your race with a lineage, replace any Ability Score Increases you previously had with these.

**Languages**  
Your character can speak, read, and write Common and one other language that you and your DM agree is appropriate for the character. The *Player's Handbook* offers a list of widespread languages to choose from. The DM is free to add or remove languages from that list for a particular campaign. If you are replacing your race with a lineage, you retain any languages you had and gain no new languages.

**Creature Type**  
Every creature in D&D, including every player character, has a special tag in the rules that identifies the type of creature they are. Most player characters are of the Humanoid type. A race option presented here tells you what your character's creature type is.  
*List of Types.* Here's a list of the game's creature types in alphabetical order: Aberration, Beast, Celestial, Construct, Dragon, Elemental, Fey, Fiend, Giant, Humanoid, Monstrosity, Ooze, Plant, Undead. These types don't have rules themselves, but some rules in the game affect creatures of certain types in different ways. For example, the text of the *cure wounds* spell specifies that the spell doesn't work on a creature that has the Construct or Undead type.  
*Having More Than One Type.* Some creatures are of more than one creature type. If an effect works on at least one of a creature's types, that effect can work on that creature. For example, if you are both a Humanoid and an Undead, *cure wounds* works on you, since the spell works on a Humanoid.

Alongside darkvision, the deathless nature of a reborn makes it resistant to poison, provides advantage on death saving throws, and removes the need to eat, drink, sleep or breathe.

DOWNLOAD THE PDF NOW

To see the full treasure trove of *Unearthed Arcana* articles, covering new classes and feats, conversions of rules from previous editions, and much more, [visit the archive](#).

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# UNEARTHED ARCANA 2021

## Gothic Lineages

By F. Wesley Schneider, Ben Petrisor, and Jeremy Crawford, with input from the rest of the D&D design team

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## Design Note: Changes to Racial Traits

In 2020, the book *Tasha's Cauldron of Everything* introduced the option to customize several of your character's racial traits, specifically the Ability Score Increase trait, the Language trait, and traits that give skill, armor, weapon, or tool proficiencies.

Following in that book's footsteps, the race options in this article and in future D&D books lack the Ability Score Increase trait, the Language trait, the Alignment trait, and any other trait that is purely cultural. Racial traits henceforth reflect only the physical or magical realities of being a player character who's a member of a particular lineage. Such traits include things like darkvision, a breath weapon (as in the dragonborn), or innate magical ability (as in the forest gnome). Such traits don't include cultural characteristics, like language or training with a weapon or a tool, and the traits also don't include an alignment suggestion, since alignment is a choice for each individual, not a characteristic shared by a lineage.

Finally, going forward, the term "race" in D&D refers only to the suite of game features used by player characters. Said features don't have any bearing on monsters and NPCs who are members of the same species or lineage, since monsters and NPCs in D&D don't rely on race or class to function. Moreover, DMs are empowered to customize the features of the creatures in their game as they wish.

## Dhampir

Poised between the worlds of the living and the dead, dhampirs retain their grip on life yet are endlessly tested by vicious hungers. Their ties to the undead grant dhampirs a taste of a vampire's deathless prowess in the form of increased speed, darkvision, and a life-draining bite. With unique insights into the nature of the undead, many dhampirs turn to the lives of adventurers and monster hunters. Their reasons are often deeply personal. Some seek danger, imagining monsters as personifications of their own hungers. Others pursue revenge against whatever turned them into a dhampir. And still others embrace the solitude of the hunt, striving to distance themselves from those who'd tempt their hunger.

### Dhampir Hungers

Every dhampir knows a thirst slaked only by the living. This desire is a whisper in the mind, a tinge to the sight, a reflex constantly needing to be suppressed. Those who overindulge their thirst risk losing control and forever viewing

others as prey. Those who resist might find exceptional ways of controlling their urges or suppress it through constant, molar-grinding restraint. In any case, temptation haunts dhampirs, and circumstances conspire to give them endless reasons to indulge.

While many dhampirs thirst for blood, your character might otherwise gain sustenance from the living. Roll on or choose an option from the Dhampir Hungers table to determine what tempts your character to feed.

### Dhampir Hungers

| d8 | Hunger                        |
|----|-------------------------------|
| 1  | Blood                         |
| 2  | Flesh or raw meat             |
| 3  | Cerebral spinal fluid         |
| 4  | Esoteric humors               |
| 5  | Psychic energy                |
| 6  | A color from one's appearance |
| 7  | Dreams                        |
| 8  | Life energy                   |

### Dhampir Origins

Dhampirs often arise from encounters with vampires, but all manner of macabre bargains, necromantic influences, and encounters with mysterious immortals might have transformed your character. The Dhampir Origins table provides suggestions for how your character gained their lineage.

### Dhampir Origins

| d8 | Origin  |
|----|---|
| 1  | You are the reincarnation of an ancestor who was a vampiric tyrant.   |
| 2  | Your pact with a predatory deity, fiend, fey, or spirit causes you to share their hunger.   |
| 3  | You survived being attacked by a vampire but were forever changed.  |
| 4  | A parasite inhabits your body. You indulge your hunger to sate it.  |
| 5  | You loved an immortal and were willing to be transformed into a vampire to join them, but tragedy interrupted the transformation. |
| 6  | You are a diminished manifestation of an otherworldly being. Slaking your hunger hastens your renewal.                            |
| 7  | You don't know your origins, but you were raised by vampires or other monsters.   |
| 8  | A radical experiment changed your body, making you reliant on others for vital fluids.  |

## Dhampir Traits

**Type:** Humanoid and Undead

**Size:** Medium or Small (choose when you gain this lineage)

**Speed:** 35 feet

**Darkvision.** You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light and in darkness as if it were dim light.

**Spider Climb.** You have a climbing speed equal to your walking speed. In addition, at 3rd level, you can move up, down, and across vertical surfaces and upside down along ceilings, while leaving your hands free.

**Vampiric Bite.** Your fanged bite is a natural weapon, which counts as a simple melee weapon with which you are proficient. You add your Constitution modifier to the attack and damage rolls when you attack with your bite. Your bite deals 1d4 piercing damage on a hit. While you are missing half or more of your hit points, you have advantage on attack rolls you make with this bite.

When you use your bite and hit a creature that isn't a Construct or an Undead, you can empower yourself in one of the following ways of your choice:

- regain hit points equal to the damage dealt by the bite
- gain a bonus to the next ability check or attack roll you make; the bonus equals the damage dealt by the bite

You can empower yourself with your bite a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

## Hexblood

Where wishing fails, ancient magic can offer a heart's desire—at least, for a time. Hexbloods are individuals infused with eldritch magic, fey energy, or mysterious witchcraft. Some who enter into bargains with hags gain their deepest wishes but eventually find themselves transformed. These changes evidence a hag's influence: ears that split in forked points, skin in wild shades, lengthy hair that regrows if cut, and an irremovable living crown. Along with these marks, hexbloods manifest hag-like traits, such as long life, darkvision, and a variety of magical

methods to beguile the senses and avoid the same.

While many hexbloods gain their lineage after making a deal with a hag, others reveal their nature as they age—particularly if a hag influenced them early in life or even before their birth. Many hexbloods turn to lives of adventure, seeking to discover the mysteries of their magic, to forge a connection with their fey natures, or to avoid a hag that obsesses over them.

## Heir of Hags

One way hags create more of their kind is through the creation of hexbloods. Every hexblood exhibits features suggestive of the hag whose magic inspires their powers. This includes an unusual crown, often called a “eldercross” or “witch’s turn.” This living, garland-like part of a hexblood’s body extends from their temples and wraps behind the head, serving as a visible mark of the bargain between hag and hexblood, a debt owed, or a change to come.

### Becoming a Hag

Hags can undertake a ritual to irreversibly transform a hexblood they created into a new hag, either one of their own kind or that embodies the hexblood’s nature. This requires that both the hag and hexblood be in the same place and consent to the lengthy ritual—circumstances most hexbloods shun but might come to accept over the course of centuries. Once a hexblood undergoes this irreversible ritual, they emerge as a hag NPC no longer under the control of the hexblood’s player, unless the DM rules otherwise.

## Hexblood Origins

A bargain with a hag or other eerie forces transformed your character into a magical being. Roll on or choose an option from the Hexblood Origins table to determine how your character gained their lineage.

### Hexblood Origins

| d8 | Origin  |
|----|---|
| 1  | Seeking a child, your parent made a bargain with a hag. You are the result of that arrangement. |
| 2  | Fey kidnappers swapped you and your parents’ child.   |
| 3  | A coven of hags lost one of their members. You were created to replace the lost hag.            |

- 4 You were cursed as a child. A deal with the spirits of the forest transformed you into a hexblood, now free of the curse.
- 5 You began life as a fey creature, but an accident or crime changed you and forced you from your home.
- 6 A slighted druid transformed you and bound you to live only so long as a sacred tree bears fruit.
- 7 You made a deal with a hag, but they twisted your words and transformed you.
- 8 You are a child of the wilds. Animals and mysterious whispers were the only family you ever knew.

## Hexblood Traits

**Type:** Fey and Humanoid

**Size:** Medium or Small (choose when you gain this lineage)

**Speed:** 30 feet

**Darkvision.** You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light and in darkness as if it were dim light.

**Fey Resilience.** You have advantage on saving throws you make to avoid or end the charmed condition on yourself.

**Hex Magic.** You can cast the *disguise self* and *hex* spells with this trait. Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma is your spellcasting ability for these spells (choose when you gain this lineage). Once you cast either of these spells with this trait, you can't cast that spell with it again until you finish a long rest. You can also cast these spells using any spells slots you have.

**Magic Token.** As an action, you can harmlessly pull out one of your nails, a tooth, or a lock of hair. This token is imbued with magic until you finish a long rest. While the token is imbued in this way, you can use an action to send a telepathic message to the creature holding or carrying the token, as long as you are on the same plane of existence and are within 10 miles of it. The message can contain up to twenty-five words.

In addition, while you are within 10 miles of the token, you can use an action to enter a trance for 1 minute, during which you can see and hear from the token as if you were located where it is. While you are using your senses at the token's location, you are blinded and deafened in regard to your own surroundings. Afterward, the token is harmlessly destroyed.

Once you create a token using this feature, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest, at which point your missing part regrows.

## Reborn

Death isn't always the end. The reborn exemplify this, being individuals who have died yet, somehow, still live. Some reborn exhibit the scars of fatal fates, their ashen flesh, missing limbs, or bloodless veins making it clear that they've been touched by death. Other reborn are marvels of magic or science, being stitched together from disparate beings or bearing mysterious minds in manufactured bodies. Whatever their origins, reborn know a new life and seek experiences and answers all their own.

## Faded Memories

Reborn suffer from some manner of discontinuity, an interruption of their lives or physical state that their minds are ill equipped to deal with. Their memories of events before this interruption are often vague or absent. Occasionally, the most unexpected experiences might cause sensations or visions of the past to come rushing back.

Rather than sleeping, reborn regularly sit and dwell on the past, hoping for some revelation of what came before. Most of the time, these are dark, silent stretches. Occasionally, though, in a moment of peace, stress, or excitement, a reborn gains a glimpse of what came before. When you desire to have such a dreamlike vision, roll on the Lost Memories table to inspire its details.

### Lost Memories

#### d8 Memory

- 1 You recall a physically painful moment. What mark or scar on your body does it relate to?
- 2 A memory causes you to shed a tear. Is it a bitter or cheerful memory? Does recalling it make you feel the same way?
- 3 You recall a childhood memory. What about that event or who you were still influences you?
- 4 A memory brings with it the voice of someone once close to you. How do they advise you?
- 5 You recall enjoying something that you can't stand doing now. What is it? Why don't you like it now?

- 6 A memory carries a vivid smell or sensation. What are you going to do to recreate that experience?
- 7 You faintly remember a place that couldn't possibly exist. What is this vision? How does it make you feel?
- 8 You experience a memory you're certain isn't your own. How does it seem unnatural? Could it be a glimpse of a past nightmare or something worse?

## Reborn Origins

Reborn might originate from circumstances similar to those of various undead or constructs. Roll on or choose an option from the Reborn Origins table to determine how your character gained their lineage.

### Reborn Origins

#### d8 Origins

- 1 You were magically resurrected but something went wrong.
- 2 Stitches bind your body's mismatched pieces, and your memories come from multiple different lives.
- 3 After clawing free from your grave, you realized you have no memories except for a single name.
- 4 You were a necromancer's undead servant for years. One day, your consciousness returned.
- 5 You awoke in an abandoned laboratory alongside complex designs for clockwork organs.
- 6 You were released after being petrified for generations. Your memories have faded, though, and your body is not what it once was.
- 7 Your body hosts a possessing spirit that shares its memories and replaces your missing appendages with phantasmal limbs.
- 8 In public, you pass as an unremarkable individual, but you can feel the itchy straw stuffing inside you.

## Reborn Traits

**Type:** Humanoid, as well as Construct or Undead (choose when you gain this lineage)

**Size:** Medium or Small (choose when you gain this lineage)

**Speed:** 30 feet

**Darkvision.** You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light and in darkness as if it were dim light.

**Deathless Nature.** You have escaped death, a fact represented by the following benefits:

- You have advantage on saving throws against disease and being poisoned, and you have resistance to poison damage.
- You have advantage on death saving throws.
- You don't need to eat, drink, or breathe.
- You don't need to sleep, and magic can't put you to sleep. You can finish a long rest in 4 hours if you spend those hours in an inactive, motionless state, during which you retain consciousness.

**Knowledge from a Past Life.** You temporarily remember sporadic glimpses of the past, perhaps faded memories from ages ago or a previous life. When you make an ability check that uses a skill, you can roll a d6 and add the number rolled to the check. You can use this feature a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.





## D&D Classics

Take a look. This issue, it's in a book... a great many books, shelved in Candlekeep and beyond.

by Bart Carroll

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### BOOKS, BOOKS, GLORIOUS BOOKS

“A book is a wonderful mechanism to launch a narrative,” Chris Perkins explains when asked about *Candlekeep Mysteries*, “and Candlekeep is full of books, so I thought it would be fun to use books to kick off the adventures.”

With our coverage of *Candlekeep Mysteries* and its framing of adventures, let's further explore the various books surrounding D&D. Both those within the game as well as others recommended by the adventures' creators!



## BOOKS WITHIN THE GAME

When it comes to books *within* the D&D multiverse, the most obvious examples include spellbooks. It's been a mainstay that wizards record their magical knowledge in such books, and finding other wizards' spellbooks provides a potentially rich treasure of new spells to copy over. As the first edition *DMG* states: "Magic-users will haunt dusty libraries and peruse musty tomes in the hopes of gleaning but a single incantation to add to their store of magic."

However, D&D boasts a trove of other tomes, librams, grimoires, and manuals to be found. A cursory investigation reveals a few titles that even allow characters the chance to study and improve themselves. Three such works (from the game's earliest days and still in "active circulation") provide ability score bonuses: the



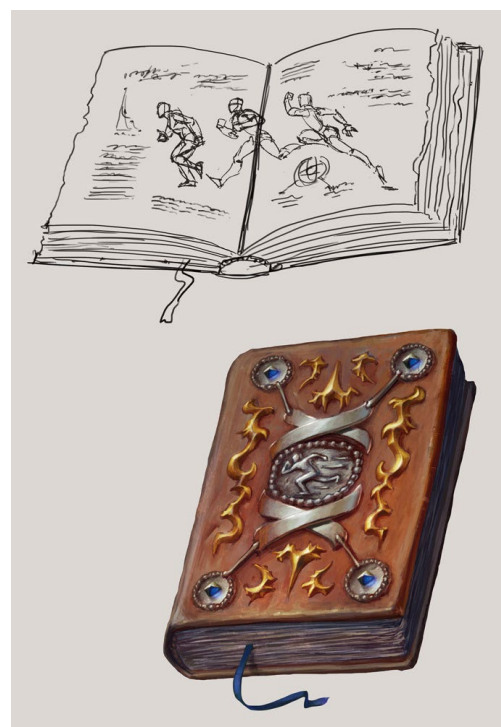
*Manual of Gainful Exercise* (for Strength), *Manual of Quickness of Action* (Dexterity), and *Manual of Bodily Health* (Constitution).

Somewhat oddly, these benefit the more physical-based abilities...

which calls to mind Mister

Miyagi's surprised question about Daniel learning karate from a book (although to be fair, during quarantine I've been learning yoga and HIIT workouts from YouTube, so what can I really say).

The first edition *DMG* also included a number of other works (now "out of print") that granted an added level of experience when read by particular classes; the *Librams of Gainful Conjunction*, *Silver Magic*, and *Ineffable Damnation* for good, neutral, and evil wizards, respectively; the *Manual of Puissant Skill of Arms*, for fighters and bards, and the *Manual of Stealthy Pilfering*, for thieves. Before becoming artifacts in later editions, the *Book of Exalted Deeds* and the *Book Vile Darkness* were similar magic items for good and evil-aligned clerics.



All good choices to improve your health and advance your career.

But how about picking up a new hobby? For readers with a tinkering bent, there's the *Manual of Golems* detailing the creation of these constructs. A literal how-to instruction manual—such as, before YouTube tutorials, there existed *Time Life's* 36-volume *Home Repair & Improvement* series (this winter I could have really used *Vol. 33: Weatherproofing*).

And that's just browsing a few aisles of the game's bookshelves.

## A LIBRARY OF ADVENTURE

Of course, what better home for the books of D&D than the game's most famous library? When it came to framing the adventures of *Candlekeep Mysteries*, Chris Perkins tells us: “Candlekeep appeared briefly in *Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus*, but we had to trim a lot of information for space reasons. I felt it deserved more attention. It's the kind of place heroes can visit again and again, and it's fairly easy to port into other campaign settings.



As such, Chris wrote a one-page pitch for an anthology of adventures, each one revolving around a book in the library. “Each book would have its own ‘personality’ and contain a mystery of some sort—something compelling enough to pull the heroes into the story,” he says.

The anthology approach worked well for two reasons, Chris adds. For one, DMs often need short adventures to slip into their campaigns (hence the success of other anthologies: *Tales from the Yawning Portal*, and *Ghosts of Saltmarsh*). In addition, the format also allowed for multiple new creators to take part.

Earlier in this issue's welcome





letter, we spoke about the first edition *DMG*'s Appendix N and its list of “inspirational and educational” reading. That original list included Poul Anderson, John Bellairs, Leigh Brackett, Fredric Brown, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Lin Carter, L. Sprague de Camp, August Derleth, Lord Dunsany, P.J. Farmer, Gardner Fox, Robert E. Howard, Sterling Lanier, Fritz Leiber, H.P. Lovecraft, A. Merritt, Michael Moorcock, Andre Norton, Andrew J. Offutt, Fletcher Pratt, Fred Saberhagen, Margaret St. Clair, J.R.R. Tolkien, Jack Vance,

Stanley Weinbaum, Manly Wade Wellman, Jack Williamson, and Roger Zelazny.

With multiple writers and designers contributing to *Candlekeep Mysteries*, we asked several of them to share their own lists as well. What books may have kindled their interest in fantasy or gaming, sparked the inspiration for their particular adventures, or even just helped get them through this past year?

## Kelly Lynne D'Angelo

- Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding Sweetgrass*.
- Lanza, Robert. *Biocentrism*.
- Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Earthsea* series.

*Notes:* Books! Gotta love 'em. A few of the fantasy series books I've enjoyed that inspire me are the *Earthsea* series by Ursula K. Le Guin as well as *Biocentrism* by Robert Lanza. Also, I would toss in *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer. *Earthsea* is fantasy, but the other two really expand one's mind to thinking in bigger, more philosophical levels—and *Braiding Sweetgrass* is an amazing, eye-opening lens into Indigenous wisdom and scientific knowledge. I think expanding our lens in fantasy requires expanding our lens on

the world at large. And with that, it all echoes back to us.

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## Jennifer Kretchmer

- Adams, Douglas. *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.
- Bradbury, Ray. *The Illustrated Man*.
- Butcher, Jim. *The Dresden Files*.
- Butler, Octavia. *Kindred*.
- Connelly, John. *The Book of Lost Things*.
- Dahl, Roald. *Matilda*.
- Gaiman, Neil. *Neverwhere, Sandman*.
- Herbert, Frank. *Dune*.
- Juster, Norton. *The Phantom Tollbooth*.
- King, Stephen. *Salem's Lot*.
- Lowry, Lois. *The Giver*.
- Mack, Carol K.; Mack, Dinah. *A Field Guide to Demons, Fairies, Fallen Angels, and Other Subversive Spirits*.
- Maguire, Gregory. Any of his works.
- Márquez, Gabriel García. Collected novellas.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. Complete works.
- Ratey, John. *A User's Guide to the Brain*.
- Rodriguez, Gabriel; Hill, Joe. *Locke & Key*.
- Rothfuss, Patrick. *The Kingkiller Chronicle*.
- Shakespeare, William. Complete works.
- Unknown, *The Odyssey*.
- Verghese, Abraham. *Cutting for Stone*.
- White, T.H. *The Once and Future King*.
- Wong, Alice. *Disability Visibility*.
- Wrede, Patricia C. *Dealing with Dragons*.

Things that absolutely informed my adventure:

- Borges, Jorge Luis. *Labyrinths*. This is, and remains, one of the most formative books in my approach to science fiction and fantasy. Borges' ideas of multiverses continue to astonish me, and his language is so beautiful. I highly recommend reading them in

the original Spanish if possible (though some of his stories originated in English), as something is always lost in translation. But even translated, his stories are endlessly beautiful. *The Library of Babel*, which chronicles a universe-sized library, is uniquely fitting for *Candlekeep Mysteries*, but *Funes the Memorious* is a story that I both find deeply moving and strongly impacted my ideas around diviners, long-lived beings, and monsters such as beholders.

- Guillermo del Toro, *At Home with Monsters*, *Cabinet of Curiosities*. These are my go-to books for inspiration. Constantly. Whenever I need to find a creative spark, I thumb through these books and look at Del Toro's notebooks. His imagination is unlike anyone else's and simply observing his creative process has frequently helped me find unexpected ideas, stories, imagery, and hooks. Ironically, he was heavily influenced by Moorcock, so there's some elfception going on there...
- L'Engle, Madeleine. *A Wrinkle in Time*. This, *Matilda*, and *The Phantom Tollbooth* probably can't be divested from anything I write... ever. They were childhood me's three most formative books, and they taught me to love fantasy, dimensional/planar travel, wordplay, and more. The demiplane in my adventure certainly could have been a planet or a pit stop that Mrs. Which, Whatsit, and Who popped by with Meg and Calvin on the way to Camazotz.
- Lightman, Alan. *Einstein's Dreams*. Hardly anyone I talk to has read this, but I can't recommend it highly enough. Written by a physicist who has taught at Harvard and M.I.T., it's an imagining of Einstein's various dreams about the movement of time prior to forming the Theory of Relativity. It's a very short book, written vignette-style with interludes. Each vignette hypothesizes a different way that time could move, and how the people living in a world with that type of time would function. I pull on it for Feywild goodies, Far Realms ideas, wild magic zones, and much, much more. Side note—several of Borges' stories, including *Funes the Memorious*, could absolutely fit right in as vignettes in *Einstein's Dreams*.
- Roach, Mary. *Stiff*. An amazing, thoughtful, touching, and often very funny exploration of how we deal with our dead, mourning rituals, etc. All of Roach's books are absolutely spectacular and I

turn to them often.

*Notes:* I also have been doing a deep delve back into many of the older D&D books, especially the second edition blue and maroon splat books and some of the third edition setting books—I always find new ideas buried when I go down those rabbit holes! (And since I was bringing back the country of Tashalar, I needed to dig pretty deep into the archives.)

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## Chris Lindsay

- Effinger, George Alec. *When Gravity Fails*.
  - Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*.
  - Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Earthsea* series.
  - Rice, Anne. *The Vampire Chronicles*.
  - Stephenson, Neal. *Snow Crash*.
  - Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Hobbit, Lord of the Rings*.
- 

## Sarah Madsen

- Carey, Jacqueline. *Kushiel's Legacy* series.
  - Harrison, Kim. *The Hollows* series.
  - Huff, Tanya. Complete works.
  - Kostova, Elizabeth. *The Historian*.
  - Rawn, Melanie. *Ruins of Ambrai* trilogy (unfinished).
  - Smith, L.J. *The Forbidden Game* trilogy and *The Vampire Diaries*.
  - Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*.
  - Taylor, Laini. *Daughter of Smoke and Bone* trilogy, *Strange the Dreamer* duology.
  - Turton, Stuart. *The 7 1/2 Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle*.
  - Wrede, Patricia C. *Dealing with Dragons*.
- 

## Michael Polkinghorn

- Asprin, Robert Lynn. *Myth Adventures, Thieves' World*.
- Brooks, Terry. *Shannara* series.



- Lewis, C.S. *Chronicles of Narnia*.
- McCaffrey, Anne. Various.
- Norton, Andre. Various.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. *Lord of the Rings*.

*Notes:* Like most fantasy enthusiasts, my reading list goes on and on and on. I started with the *Chronicles of Narnia* and graduated to the *Lord of the Rings* and *Shannara* series. Along the way I had numerous other influences. In high school I went through the *Thieves' World* series, because you can't be an edgy teen in the '80s without reading that, right? I also dipped into the *Myth Adventures series*.

Another great influence was not fantasy but science fiction. Especially the works from the golden age of science fiction, which read like fantasy adventures with spaceships. I particularly draw on the works of Andre Norton and Anne McCaffrey, who like many sci-fi authors jumped back and forth from sci-fi to fantasy. There are a wealth of ideas in sci-fi you can mold into your fantasy campaigns.

This year:

- Scalzi, John. *Redshirts*.
- Weir, Andy. *The Martian*.

*Notes:* Something about having to survive in a world trying to kill you seems to be touching a chord right now for some reason.

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## Hannah Rose

- Croggon, Alison. *The Pellinor* series (starting with *The Naming*).
- McCaffrey, Anne. *The Dragonriders of Pern*.
- McKinley, Robin. *The Hero and the Crown*.
- Pierce, Tamora. Any of her works (I'll highlight *The Immortals* quartet and the *Circle of Magic* quartet as particularly D&D-worthy influences).
- Wrede, Patricia C. *Dealing with Dragons*.

This year:

- Muir, Tamsyn. *Gideon the Ninth*.

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## Derek Ruiz

- Jodorowsky, Alejandro. *The Incal*, *The Metabarons*.

*Notes:* They're more sci-fi than fantasy, but I think they may inspire many people.

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## Brandes Stoddard

- Alexander, Lloyd. *The Chronicles of Prydain*.
  - Brust, Steven. *The Vlad Taltos* series, the *Khaavren Romances*.
  - Bujold, Lois McMaster. *Curse of Chalion*, *Paladin of Souls*, *The Hallowed Hunt*, the *Vorkosigan Saga*.
  - Cook, Glen. *The Black Company*.
  - Cornwell, Bernard. *The Warlord Chronicles* (*Winter King*, *Enemy of God*, *Excalibur*).
  - Gaiman, Neil. *Sandman* graphic novels, *The Graveyard Book*, *American Gods*, *Anansi Boys*.
  - Gladstone, Max. *Three Parts Dead*, *Two Serpents Rise*.
  - Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Earthsea* series.
  - L'Engle, Madeleine. *A Wrinkle in Time*, *Wind in the Door*, *Many Waters*, *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*.
  - Morgenstern, Erin. *The Night Circus*, *The Starless Sea*.
  - Niffenegger, Audrey. *The Time-Traveler's Wife*.
  - Rivera, K. Arsenault. *The Tiger's Daughter*.
  - Shellabarger, Samuel. *The Prince of Foxes*.
  - Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Silmarillion*.
  - *Beowulf*.
  - Vance, Jack. *The Dying Earth* series, *The Green Pearl*.
  - White, T.H. *The Once and Future King*.
  - Zelazny, Roger. *The Chronicles of Amber*.
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## Amy Vorpahl

- Follett, Ken. Any of his works, especially *The Pillars of the Earth*.
- Jacques, Brian. *Redwall*.
- Pullman, Philip. *His Dark Materials*.
- Rothfuss, Patrick. *The Kingkiller Chronicle*.
- Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter*.
- Sanderson, Brandon. *Mistborn*.
- Stroud, Jonathan. *Bartimaeus*.
- Stephenson, Neal. Any of his works, especially *The Diamond Age*.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. *Lord of the Rings*.

This year:

- Corey, S.A. *The Expanse* series (beginning with *Leviathan Wakes*).



## ADVENTURE HOOKS

- Looking for more magical books for your campaigns? *Tasha's Cauldron of Everything* recently brought forth new manuscripts, grimoires, and atlases—plus, the return of the famed *Demonomicon of Iggwilv*!
- While the *Manual of Golems* exists, what about devising similar

books for helmed horrors, iron defenders, and clockwork creatures? Or new pages for different golem types (and suggestions for odd combinations or augmentations)?

- Who doesn't love it when book spines (or even **milk cartons** for that matter) display a **collective design**? What might be revealed or magically unlocked if all books in a set are recovered and shelved together?
- When it comes to spellbooks, any number of added obstacles might be introduced before their spells can be copied over. For example, a wizard might use a unique cipher that must first be solved before the spell can be translated (consider the **Voynich manuscript**).
- Special inks might also be required before a particular spell can be written or copied over; the ingredients for which present any number of challenges to collect (owlbear milk?).
- I'm told that **dragons love tacos** (also a fine book). True or not, dragons *do* love to hoard wealth, and metallic dragons (silver and brass especially) might amass theirs in the form of a secret library. Caution to anyone who needs a book from their collection, even just to borrow.
- Libraries and bookstores in the D&D universe must stock their fair share of fiction. While presented as "mere" stories, might some of them contain veiled clues or directions to actual hidden locations in your campaign?
- Just who might be the original author of the *Manual of Gainful Exercise* or similar magical works? Do they have a tomb or library of their own, and what might be found therein? For this particular manual, perhaps it's a mausoleum filled with physical challenges that, when completed, provide access to various treasure; and when failed, dump green slime on adventurers (I may be nostalgic for *Double Dare*).

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## FINAL THANKS

Our thanks to readers, writers, librarians, teachers, and publishers everywhere. Books are awesome in any format, and we love to have as many of them in our lives as possible!

And a final thanks to Chris Perkins for taking the time to discuss



*Candlekeep Mysteries*. When asked about his own gaming experiences in libraries, Chris replied: “I played D&D in a library once, and it didn’t go well. We were too loud.”

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# Streaming Highlights

This issue's streams showcase D&D personalities, a worthy cause, and a rivalry in Waterdeep...



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## DRAGON TALK

Every week the doors of the castle are flung open and Shelly Mazzanoble and Greg Tito invite the audience inside the walls of Dungeons & Dragons for exclusive interviews and previews! They sit down with celebrities and personalities from across gaming and pop culture to talk about the latest phenomena in roleplaying, video games, comics, novels, movies, and television. And the *Dragon Talk* team have collected a number of recent high points to enjoy:

[Watch the January Highlights](#)

“Our interview with the entire [cast of the \*Transplanar RPG\*](#) livestream was challenging as it was our largest ever interview group.

That many people might have been difficult over zoom. But thanks to the stellar preplanning and preparation from the cast, we knocked it out of the park as we discussed their story, characters, and world building,” says Greg Tito.

“They were fantastic at knowing which question each of them was going to hit, which showed their commitment of wanting all the voices being heard. That’s like a microcosm of what *Dragon Talk* is trying to do in the D&D community.”



**Geek Girl Strong** founder, Robyn Warren, also impressed Shelly with her combination of fitness and geek culture.

“I liked her creative approach to fitness, which was especially aimed at women or femme presenting people,” Shelly remembers. “When she was a teacher, Robyn drew on geek culture to inspire her students to want to do regular fitness exercises such as running around the track, turning them into *Hunger Games*-style activities.”

Shelly bonded with Robyn after suggesting she’d have the necessary skills to become a Dungeon Master. “If you can wrangle ten 12-year-old kids playing sports, you can likely DM for five fantasy fans around a table.”



Greg, meanwhile, fanboyed out with actor **Anthony Rapp**, best known for his roles in the stage version of *Rent*, the movie *Dazed and Confused*, and currently keeping the ship in the air as Paul Stamets in *Star Trek: Discovery*!

“It was really cool to geek out with Anthony about his newfound love of D&D,” says Greg. “Our origin stories were similar in that he played a little when he was younger but then jumped in with two feet as an adult. We also have a connection in the theater world, which I didn’t talk about too much in the interview, but it’s always cool to experience community connections from our shared history in NYC!”





**Thompson**, among many others!

New episodes of *Dragon Talk*, the official Dungeons & Dragons podcast, release every week and you can **listen here** or **watch here**.

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## JASPER'S GAME DAY

You are NOT a critical failure! That's the message being boomed out three times as loud as normal with the help of *thaumaturgy* by Jasper's Game Day. Founder Fenway Jones started the non-profit charity when she lost two friends to suicide at the age of fourteen. The 501c3 charity uses gaming to raise money and awareness, with all its proceeds directly impacting suicide prevention across the globe.

"I wanted to use the pain I was experiencing to help others avoid the same kind of hurt and suffering. With the help of my mentor Satine Phoenix, we hosted an event in Detroit and that impacted so many people that we began to receive requests for more information from around the country," Fenway tells *Dragon+*.

"I chose to focus on the gaming community because one of the friends I lost was a high school student I enjoyed gaming and going

to conventions with. This year, almost four years later, we'll host events online in five different countries, played in three different languages, and in forty different US states!"

Fenway's YouTube show #everyrollmatters invites gamers and mental health professionals to discuss the positive effects of role play and gaming on mental health. The first episode features Dr. April Foreman and Jasper's Game Day advisor Shareef Jackson.



The charity also hosts a major event each year called Jasper's Game Week, running seven days of streams and games that last almost 24 hours a day! Last year Jasper's Game Week raised over \$50,000 and Fenway hopes to double that in 2021 when the event runs from April 30 to May 10.

Impressively, Fenway achieved all of this before turning eighteen, as she recently celebrated that milestone online in a game DMed by Todd Stashwick and featuring David Blue, Adam Bradford, Kelly Bray, Amy Lynn Dzura, and B. Dave Walters.

**Watch Fenway's Birthday Bash**

**You can find more information about Jasper's Game Day at the [official website](#), make a [charitable donation](#) or connect with them on [Discord](#), [Twitter](#), and [Facebook](#). Jasper's Game Week runs from April 30 to May 10, 2021.**

## BASEMENT AND BUGBEARS

A new dramatic web series called *Basements & Bugbears* follows a group of high schoolers playing Dungeons & Dragons to help cope with their friend's recent suicide. The show is inspired by real life therapists who utilize the roleplaying aspect of D&D with their patients, and features seven characters who work through the grief of losing their friend the only way they know how: in game.

In order to deliver an authentic narrative involving suicide in a way that supports suicide prevention and awareness, *Basements & Bugbears* was developed in accordance with the National Recommendations for Depicting Suicide (developed by the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention). The show deals with issues such as teen mental health, the complexities of exploring and accepting queer identity, and, ultimately, the good that gaming can bring to those that immerse themselves in their stories.

*Episode 1: Unlikely Adventurers* was filmed in early 2020 with the goal of creating an entire season. Watch the video below to show your support or head to [the \*Basements & Bugbears\* website](#) to learn more about the show, and help get a full series commissioned.



To celebrate the launch of the first episode, the show partnered with charity Jasper's Game Day to host a D&D charity livestream. The event consisted of three games of D&D broadcast on [Twenty Sides to Every Story's Twitch page](#). The games featured NFL player Travis

Frederick; podcasters Lauren Shippen (*Bright Sessions*) and Andrew Strother (*Roll Persuasion*); licensed D&D therapists Dr. Megan Connell and Dr. Rachel Kowert; professional D&D players Shareef Jackson and Vee Mus'e; among others!

Through the exploding birds, pizza cheese hijinks, and the power of trains and friendship (but mostly trains), the three games helped raise \$1,000 for Jasper's Game Day and suicide awareness and prevention.

The first game featured DM Dr. Megan Connell and players Jeff Athey, Adam Johns, Hope LaVelle, and Andrew Strother.

[Watch Stream 1](#)

The second game featured DM Adam G. Brooks and players Jordan Cobb, Travis Frederick, Mike (I Guess), Shareef Jackson, and Shannon Roby.

[Watch Stream 2](#)

The third game featured DM Bri Neumann and players Jeff Athey, Wes Cordell, Fenway Jones, Vee Mus'e, and Lauren Shippen.

[Watch Stream 3](#)

**You can find more information about *Basements & Bugbears* at the [official website](#), and connect with them on [Twitter](#).**

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## RIVALS OF WATERDEEP

Get your whooshes ready everybody! Dungeon Master LaTia Jacquise leads experienced roleplayers and new Dungeons & Dragons players in season nine of *Rivals of Waterdeep*. In this campaign, players Tanya DePass (oathbreaker paladin/blood hunter Selise Astorio), Masood Haque (druid Gazrick Nomrad), Shareef Jackson (warlock Shaka), Brian Gray (sorcerer Virgil), and Eugenio Vargas (rogue Kent) find themselves in Candlekeep, one of the most iconic cities in the Forgotten Realms.

“It’s interesting joining a party and campaign when the characters have reached 14th level,” Eugenio tells *Dragon+*. “It means Kent has already lived a pretty full adventuring life before he and Virgil met



up with Selise, so he already has access to most of his class abilities and features mechanics-wise, and doesn't have that wide-eyed young adventurer outlook on everything from a roleplaying point of view.”



A “full adventuring life” is an apt description for a tiefling archaeologist rogue who spent his early 20s bouncing from historical site to historical site, joining up with whichever adventurers happened to be delving this dilapidated ruin or that ancient burial mound.

Kent eventually found himself helping to excavate an old mountain stronghold that used to be the headquarters for a group of Talontar (worshippers of Talona, Lady of Poison). When the adventuring party he was with had looted their fill, Kent decided to stay behind and continue his research and observations.



He was there for nearly five years, towards the end of which, he met Virgil. Virgil gradually drew Kent down from the mountains on an increasingly frequent basis until eventually, Kent decided his research was complete and moved full time to Caradoon to live the quiet life of a retired adventurer.

“It didn’t last!” Eugenio says with a laugh. He describes Kent as having a dashing sense of style and a “memorable” personality, with strengths that include research, packing, and handling dangerous poisons. When it comes to Kent’s weaknesses, he lists “humility, patience, and Virgil, but don’t tell him!”

“I’ve loved the totally improvised little *moments* that Kent and Virgil have had so far. Brian and I have talked a little about their shared history, but we also are both excited about discovering that history as we roleplay. Brian is wonderful to improv with and play off, so we’ve had some really silly, sweet, and funny moments together,” Eugenio recalls.



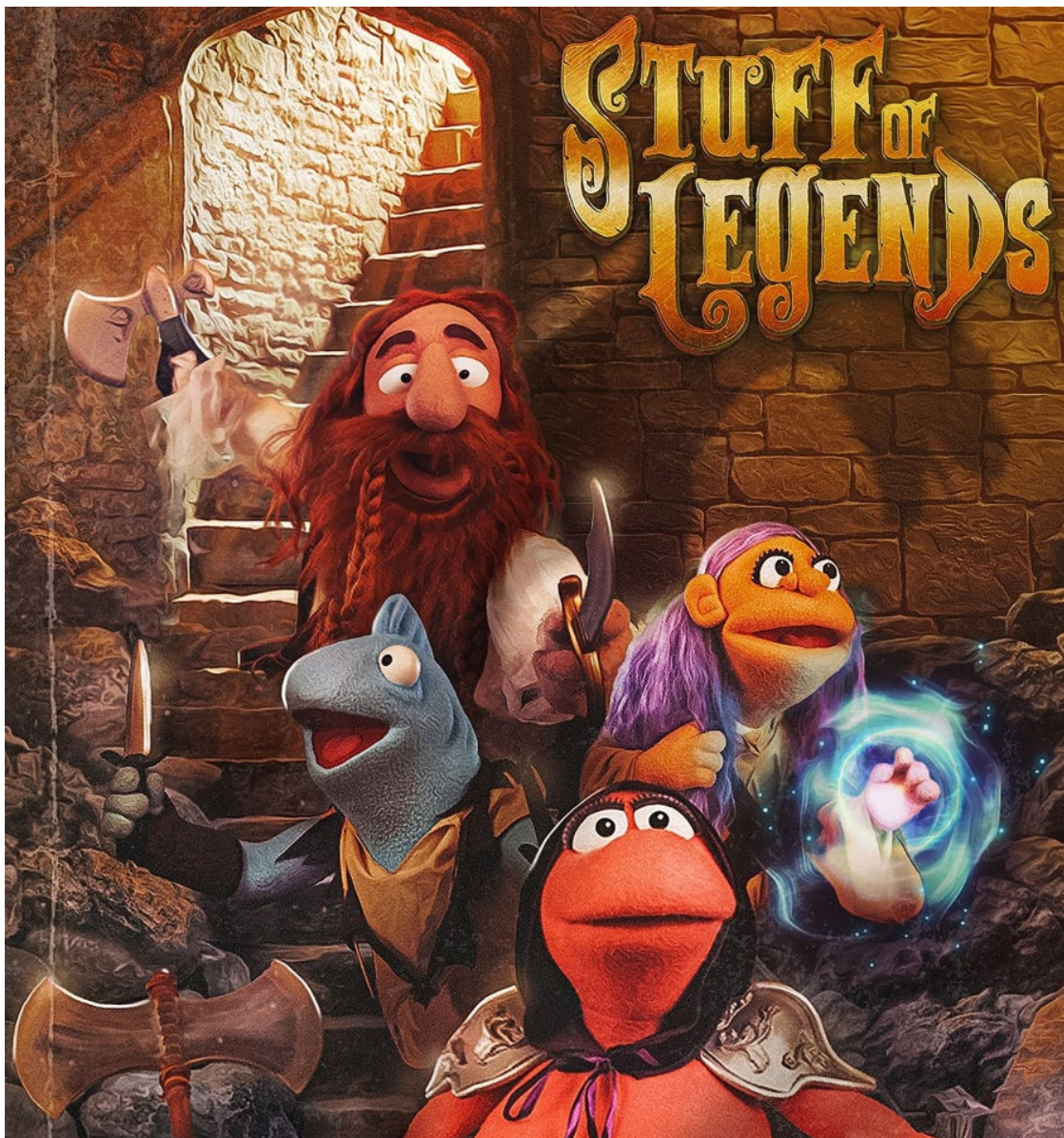
“One of my favorites was in episode three, when Virgil and Selise were having a drink and a serious conversation in Trollskull Manor and Kent, who was upstairs packing, yelled down the stairs, “VIRGIL! WHERE’S MY TRAVELLING TUNIC?” It was way funnier in the moment, so you should go and watch that episode for the full effect.”

***Rivals of Waterdeep* airs every Sunday at 10am PT / 12pm CST / 1pm ET on its [Twitch channel](#) and the official [D&D Twitch channel](#).**

## STUFF OF LEGENDS

*Like most D&D campaigns, everything on this show was made in collaboration with the players, including the designs of the characters and the visual look of the puppets. The content in the show sometimes leans more on the mature side of things and the production ensured that every performer was comfortable with the content beforehand. That said, Stuff of Legends is definitely intended for adult audiences. If you’re looking for a sweet little puppet show to enjoy with your grade school kids, this ain’t it! But if you enjoy watching adults make each other laugh with more explicit humor, kick back and enjoy Stuff of Legends.*





Joshua Ovenshire, aka **Jovenshire**, has been mashing up D&D for some time now. With the help of his friend and YouTube colleague Lasercorn, the pair have been running parallel D&D campaigns on their separate channels, with the plotlines occasionally crossing over.

“The tales both parties are telling sometimes intertwine. If you’re watching the games on both channels, you’d think, ‘Oh, I see! That was the explosion they heard over in the other game.’”

The mashups continue for his latest project, which sees the world of Dungeons & Dragons meet... puppets?!

“What makes *Stuff of Legends* different from other shows is that we have puppets! When you think puppets, your mind immediately jumps to these *Sesame Street*-style monsters with fuzzy round faces.



And that's not the direction we wanted to go. We wanted each character and creature to look like it's a part of the Dungeons & Dragons world, but in puppet form," he tells *Dragon+*.

Joshua worked with Las Vegas-based **DLUX Puppets** to build his cast and the threats they face. DLUX has **a lot of experience** working with full-sized puppets and its previous commissions include the dragon from the *Shrek* show at Universal Studios, Hollywood.

"Their work is phenomenal and they were completely on board with bringing a different kind of life to these characters. They've also imagined creatures and monsters from the Dungeons & Dragons world in a way that I've never seen before," Joshua says. "One of the creatures that pops up is a barbed devil. If you look at it in the *Monster Manual*, it's pretty ferocious. But on our show, he's a smaller puppet and his arms wiggle back and forth, which I found really funny. Using puppets feels like a cartoon. But it gives them an element of physical comedy you can't get with animation."

Joshua filled his new show with a group of actors and personalities who had mostly never played Dungeons & Dragons before. That included Lisa Foiles, from the Nickelodeon sketch comedy show *All That*; YouTuber **Brandon Rogers**, who does a lot of comedy character work; **Shanna Malcolm**, who also got her start on YouTube, but has since found a lot of success as an actress on TV shows; and longtime collaborator **Lasercorn**.

"I've worked with Lisa on a few other projects and I thought she'd be a great personality to have at the table. Brandon has the ability to navigate absurdity with his characters so masterfully, that I wanted to let him take a character in any direction and bring the audience along for the ride," Joshua explains. "Shanna brought an energy to a dragonborn that I'd never seen before. She was confident and sassy, but had this fun backstory about how her mama had left her while she was still in the egg! And finally, one of my best friends, Lasercorn. I always bring him on for tabletop projects because I think he's one of the funniest people on YouTube."

With most of the players at the table experiencing Dungeons & Dragons for the first time, the early episodes see them learning what their characters are all about and trying out their moves.

“There’s a magical moment in the third episode,” Joshua reveals, “where they aren’t actors anymore sitting down to play at a table for the first time. They are now adventurers on a campaign and they’re really playing Dungeons & Dragons. You see that moment when everything just clicks.”

The six-episode series *Stuff of Legends* is streaming now, with a new episode posting each week on **The Jovenshire YouTube channel**.

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# HEROES & VILLAINS

LICENSED APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

FROM DARKNESS TO THE LIGHT  
DRIZZT DO'URDEN  
DROW RANGER

FROM DARKNESS TO THE LIGHT  
DRIZZT DO'URDEN



[HEROESVILLAINS.COM](https://heroesvillains.com)

 [heroesvillainsbrand](https://www.instagram.com/heroesvillainsbrand)





## Chris Tulach

Our introduction to members of the D&D Team and their roles continues with the Product Manager for D&D Play.

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**T**he D&D Team relishes the opportunity to work on the world's greatest roleplaying game, and we're also aware there are a fair number of folks interested in learning more about entering the gaming industry professionally.





Chris Tulach

With that in mind, each issue we'll be chatting with staff members from a diverse set of roles to find out how they came to be valued members of our party and what advice they have for someone who might be looking to follow a similar path. **Chris Tulach**, Product Manager for D&D Play, follows Community Lead **Brandy Camel** and Senior Producer for the D&D studio **Dan Tovar** into our *zone of truth*.

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### **Where in Faerûn or the wider multiverse do you hail from?**

I was born in Eau Claire, Wisconsin in 1973. I grew up with my mom, dad, and two brothers, Nick and Ben, and we moved around the state a fair amount when I was little. My primary school was in a town called Manitowoc, near Green Bay, before we moved further south to be closer to my mom's side of the family. I spent most of my time in that area, near Milwaukee, before moving to Seattle in 2006.

### **What is your character class?**

I'm the Product Manager for D&D Play. I came back to D&D fully last fall after a five-year hiatus. From a day-to-day perspective I manage the Adventurers League play programs, and most of my time is spent on strategy and planning AL events and other D&D programs.

### **What made you want to join this party?**

I lived near **Gen Con**, because it was based in Milwaukee at the time. In 1987, when I was 14, my cousin Jason and I got dropped off there with a one-day pass. And we loved it. We went back the following year and did the same again, until eventually we're going for a full four days. By the time I'm 17 years old, I'm DMing my own games at Gen Con.



### **When did you first play D&D?**

I discovered Dungeons & Dragons at the age of 10. I already knew the board game *Dungeon!* as I had played it a couple of times with my cousin Jason. I had also recently read *The Hobbit* so I was really into fantasy and then the

Dungeons & Dragons cartoon came on television, and my mom knew that I liked it. She'd heard there was a Dungeons & Dragons game so Christmas 1983, from Santa, I opened up the red box with the Larry Elmore cover. And I started delving into the world of fantasy D&D. I didn't have anyone to play with until my brother Nick and my cousins Jason and Steve became the four staples in a D&D group. Of course, they needed somebody to run the game, so in early campaigns I was the Dungeon Master. I didn't experience Dungeons & Dragons as a player until maybe a year or two later, which is forever when you're that age.

### **What character background led to you getting the job?**

Around the same time I was DMing at Gen Con, I discovered the Role Playing Game Association (RPGA), which was running organized play games. I started to DM for the RPGA's first "Living" campaign, which was Living City. As I got older, I spent more time going to conventions for different organized play campaigns that TSR managed through the RPGA. I later applied to be a part of the Wisconsin contingent of the Living Greyhawk triad—a group of administrators responsible for their region's version of the campaign.

Alongside Jason Bulmahn and Dan Cunningham, we formed the original triad for Wisconsin. We all lived close to each other, so in-person meetings to devise our campaign were frequent—and sometimes took place in a bowling alley in Milwaukee. I was very active and spent almost every weekend either at a convention or devising and running games for people to play at a convention the following week.

Eventually, I ascended the ranks of the Living Greyhawk administrative system, first as a regional coordinator, and then as part of the global administrators, running the campaign at a top level. Then in 2006, when I was visiting Jason Bulmahn in Seattle on the

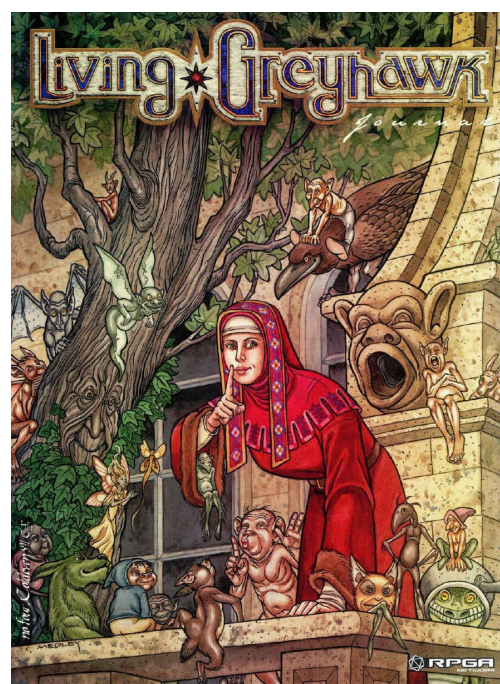
way to San Diego Comic Con, Stephen Radney-MacFarland announced that he was leaving Wizards of the Coast. He was the RPGA Content Manager who handled the organized play program's adventures for D&D. Ian Richards, who was Stephen's boss and had been in charge of the RPGA and organized play, encouraged me to apply. I thought about it for a long time, because it was a 1,500-mile move across the country, but I applied and got the job. I had my orientation at Wizards in November 2006 and the next day I got on a plane for Anaheim, California and went to Gen Con SoCal, still running from convention to convention.

I spent the next near-decade working on transitioning out of third edition, working with our marketing team to design and launch all the fourth edition programs—which included the successful D&D Encounters in-store program—and leading design of our current play program, the D&D Adventurers League.

In 2015, a year after the launch of fifth edition, D&D restructured and brought everything into one studio. I moved to work on *Magic: The Gathering*, and helped to redesign their tabletop programs to help promote more casual play. With the growth of D&D, I moved over to managing events for fifth edition. I started with a launch party in Seattle for *Dungeons & Dragons vs. Rick and Morty*, featuring a super-fun live game run by Kate Welch.

## WATCH THE RICK AND MORTY LAUNCH PARTY

My next big project was leading the event team for *D&D Live 2020*. Planning was taking place as the global pandemic started taking hold, and we eventually decided to press forward. Alongside Greg Tito, we pivoted from an in-person to Wizards' first-ever fully virtual event in



Living Greyhawk (select to view)



the span of eight weeks, and brought it to players and fans around the world.

### **How can those interested in this kind of role level up?**

This can be a difficult industry to break into because people love their jobs and often want to stay as long as they can. If you're passionate about wanting to work on Dungeons & Dragons, you don't have to be hired as a game designer to get your start. There are many disciplines that could bring you to Wizards of the Coast and you may have skills that would be valuable to other areas of the company. Once you're working within Wizards, you can take opportunities to get involved in all sorts of projects that interest you outside your core discipline, and maybe one day you'll make that your new job.

In the same vein, don't ever sell yourself short when it comes to applying for a job. It's easy to read a job posting and think you don't meet the criteria. Don't let that stop you applying for something you really want. If you find a company that you're excited to work for, keep at it even if you get passed up the first few times. If people see your name again and again, they may realize that this person really wants to be here and take a second look at your application. Be tenacious.



### **Which figure gives you inspiration?**



After almost a decade of admiring their leadership from afar, I had the pleasure of working for Witney Williams and Elaine Chase. They are both fantastic role models and mentors, each with a high degree of emotional intelligence. They're very passionate about our games and the people who play them, and they understand our players in a fundamental way. They're also wonderful leaders who take care of their staff, and make sure to elevate the people around them. I learned a lot from them about what success looks like and how to foster it in other people. Working with Witney and Elaine has been a highlight of my career.

### **Which moments have been worthy of retelling by bards?**

During the early fourth edition playtests, I was a player in a group with Chris Perkins and Rob Heinsoo. We were really stress-testing the combat systems and pushing how deadly the encounters could be, but characters were just not dying. I had a rogue character that was using a polearm—broken stuff that later got rebalanced. Chris took a week off, so Rob volunteered to play his character, a ranger who was my chief “competition” for scout in the party.

During an ensuing fight with a bugbear, Rob had Chris's ranger move into a position where the bugbear managed to capture him, using the ranger as a shield. I decided to throw caution to the wind and try to land an attack on the bugbear, not knowing that the monster could allow their captive to take the hit. I critically hit, rolled max damage, and the ranger promptly expired from my attack. We finally had our first character death of fourth edition! When Chris Perkins came back to work, he had to learn that the *one week* Rob played his character, he got them killed. I really had *nothing* to do with it, how was I to know?!

### **Which of your footprints would be visible even under the influence of *pass without trace*?**

When we started work on fourth edition, I built all of its organized play programs, including the hugely successful D&D Encounters program. I was also the design lead on D&D Adventurers League. I've been creating and maintaining other programs that help move the needle on play for the entirety of my tenure at Wizards.

### **Have there been any surprise rounds?**

The most surprising thing is that I left D&D for five years and went

off to do other work, but I was better for that experience. Stepping away from the close work that I was doing on D&D gave me the chance to grow as a person and as a contributor to the game. It prepared me to come back to this role and help lead D&D tabletop play into the future.

### **What's your favorite thing about D&D?**

Dungeons & Dragons is the best game I've ever played. It's brought me so much joy in my life. I believe in the power of roleplaying games as a transformative, positive force. They satisfy so many human needs and are very therapeutic, because they're wonderful for forging social and emotional bonds. Almost every friend I've made was through D&D.

### **What are your downtime activities?**

I got married a few years ago to my wonderful partner Kat. She does a lot of game design and I enjoy working with her on projects. And now we have a two-year-old son, Grayson, who's such a sweet little guy. Spending time with them is the most important thing for me, so we don't have a lot of social time as adults. But in a pre-pandemic world Kat and I both loved going to see live music and attending conventions together.

### **Which other fandoms or pop-culture phenomena do you follow?**

I play a fair amount of all types of tabletop games—board, card, miniatures, and roleplaying. For video games, my favorite since I discovered it has been *Destiny*. I only have time for one MMO-style game, so that's it. I also love to read both fiction and nonfiction and I still write a lot of roleplaying adventures for my groups.



Destiny video game © Activision (select to view)

### Who rolls best for Performance?

I'm responsible for getting my partner Kat into Dungeons & Dragons and she launched a really great podcast called *d20 Dames*. I was also on season one of *Adventure They Wrote*, as one of the founding members, before Grayson was born. Even though I'm obviously a little biased, I would highly recommend both of those. *Adventure They Wrote* has amazing foley work courtesy of Jason Burrows, one of the cast members and the producer.

I also love the *Myths and Legends* podcast, which is not a Dungeons & Dragons podcast as such, but is certainly adjacent to D&D. It's created by a couple, Carissa and Jason—with Carissa handling all the production work and editing, and Jason being the voice. Every episode tells a story from mythology, legend, folklore, or fairy tale from all corners of the world. They research their topic using multiple sources and then synthesize all of that into one narrative. And then Jason tells the story.

Each episode also has a two-minute stinger at the end focusing on a creature of the week. This is usually something really odd from folklore and mythology. It's a great show and something that anyone into D&D would get so much out of. It's been on the air for five years or so now and has tons of episodes to listen to.

### What's your coolest artifact?

The coolest thing on my desk at work has a lot of emotional

attachment for me. It's a custom resin cast of an earth elemental. It was made by a good friend of mine called Peter Lee. He and I both worked as judges for Dungeons & Dragons Miniatures in the 2000s, and Peter made it for me to commemorate all the really great times we had working together. He's still a good friend of mine and his creativity is unbounded. What he can do with miniatures is incredible, making minis from nothing in the days before 3D printing. He would make a sculpt and resin cast them. I love that it's such a personal gift that he made himself. Everybody looks at this cool thing on my desk and wants one. But they can't buy this, it's one of a kind.

**You can hear more from Chris Tulach and connect with him on [Twitter](#).**

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# Next Issue: Dragon+ 37

Shapes shift in the shadows as Van Richten's advice continues...



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**T**hings get arty as we head into April! If you thought *Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft* had shown off all its horrors in this issue's exclusive preview, get ready to meet a monster that's pure nightmare fuel. Artist Stephen Oakley has produced a set of concept art that will make you *wish* that everyday item was just a mimic!

There'll also be more from our dynamic duo, Adam Lee and Max Dunbar, as the PB&J of *Dragon+* introduce us to a group of shadow monk NPCs in their next *Character Spotlight*. Expect to see cool symbolism running through this monastic order and a history that favors a long-lived life.

Fenway Jones will also be on hand to tell us all about this year's **Jasper's Game Week**, which raises money for suicide prevention and awareness. And we'll take a look at a new program for UK Scouts that allows Dungeon Masters to earn an **Entertainer Badge**.

Any DM or player should also check out our *Behind the Screens* column in *Dragon+* #37. We'll provide practical tips on how to roleplay a character or NPC with a disability in a sensitive and realistic way.

There's all this, plus more exclusive previews, all of our regulars such as *Streaming Highlights*, another delve into the imposing *Dragon* archive, and much, *much* more!

(Contents subject to change)



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A big thank you to *Candlekeep Mysteries*' anthology of adventure authors for chatting with us!

## EDITORIAL

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: **Matt Chapman**

EDITOR: **Bart Carroll**

SUB-EDITORS: **Scott Fitzgerald Gray, Octavia Wolton**

### CONTRIBUTORS:

**Peter Adkison, Justice Arman, Graeme Barber, Phil Beckwith, Lauren Campbell, Ken Carcas, Jeremy Crawford, Kelly D'Angelo, Ashton Duncan, Noah Grand, Adam Hancock, Jane Hoskyn, Dan Houbrick, Alison Huang, Mark Hulmes, LaTia Jacquise, E.R.F. Jordan, Jennifer Kretchmer, Daniel Kwan, Adam Lee, Ari Levitch, Chris Lindsay, Jean Lorber, Sarah Madsen, Mira Manga, Jessica Marcum, Shelly Mazzanoble, Stefan McNinch, Jimmy Meritt, Oz Mills, Randy Mosiondz,**

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Emi Tanji, Greg Tito, Chris Tulach, S.J. Twining, Amy Vorpahl,  
Stephen David Wark, Toni Winslow-Brill, Michael Witwer,  
Octavia Wolton,**

## **DESIGN and ART**

**DESIGN DIRECTOR: Christopher Imlay**

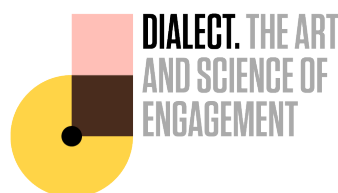
**JUNIOR DESIGNER: Annabel Miller**

**ART DIRECTOR: Daniel Ketchum**

### **CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS:**

**Stacey Allan, Mark Behm, Zoltan Boros, Clint Cearley (cover),  
Sidharth Chaturvedi, Nikki Dawes, Will Doyle, Max Dunbar,  
Caroline Gariba, Aaron Hübrich, Sam Keiser, Katerina Ladon,  
Dyson Logos, Irina Nordsol, Robin Olausson, Mike Schley, Louie  
Skaradek, Zuzanna Wuzyk, Kieran Yanner**

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## THE D&D TEAM

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